



THE GEOGRAPHY OF RELIGION

Spaces and Places of Sacredness

Religion is a core component of culture, lending vivid hues to the human mosaic. For many, religion is the most profoundly felt dimension of their identities. For this reason, it is important to clearly state what is meant by the term and provide a sense of the many ways in which religion can be manifest in people's

religion

A social system involving a set of beliefs and practices through which people seek harmony with the universe and attempt to influence the forces of nature, life, and death.

lives. **Religion** can be defined as a more or less structured set of beliefs and practices through which people seek mental and physical harmony with the powers of the universe. The rituals of religion mark the events in our lives—birth, puberty, marriage, having children, and death—that are observed and celebrated. Religions often attempt not only to accommodate but also to influence the awesome forces of nature, life, and death. Religions help people make sense of their place in the world. In literal terms, the word *religion*—derived from the Latin *religare*—means “to fasten loose parts into a coherent whole.”

But religion goes beyond a merely pragmatic set of rules for dealing with life's joys and sorrows. Most religions incorporate a sense of the supernatural that can be manifest in the concept of a God or gods who play a role in shaping human existence, in the notion of an afterlife that may involve a place of rest (or torment) for those who have died, or ideas of a soul that exists apart from our physical bodies and that may be released, or even born again, once we have died. This sense of the otherworldly is often spatially demarcat-

ed through the designation of sacred spaces, such as cemeteries, religious buildings, and sites of encounters with the supernatural.

In addition, religion is often at the heart of how people with very different worldviews can come to understand one another. So, on the one hand, the conquest of the Americas by the Iberians (people of modern-day Spain and Portugal) was often a violent affair, whereby the religious conversion of indigenous peoples to Christianity accompanied the political takeover. Temples were destroyed and coercion was often used to convert the natives to Christianity. On the other hand, the Virgin of Guadalupe, said to have appeared to the indigenous Mexican convert Juan Diego in 1531—only 10 years after Cortes's conquest of Mexico—is believed to be one of the most powerfully healing figures in the Americas to this day. Her portrait is a mixture of European and indigenous American symbols ([Figure 7.1](#), page 232). In her kind manner of speaking to Juan Diego in Nahuatl (an indigenous language spoken by central Mexicans) and her resemblance to the earth goddess Tonantzin, she made sense to native Mexicans. For the Spaniards, dark-skinned Virgins had long been part of their religious symbolism. In the midst of the violence of conquest, then, the Virgin of Guadalupe provided a mother figure that was readily acceptable to native Mexicans, was familiar to Spaniards, and acted as a bridge by which people from these two very different cultures could understand one another.



FIGURE 7.1 The Virgin of Guadalupe. This is the image believed to have appeared to Juan Diego. As he opened his cape in the presence of Bishop Zumárraga of Mexico City, roses of Castile (a powerful symbol to Spaniards) fell onto the floor and this image was left behind on the fabric of the cape. The Virgin's downcast gaze and dark features spoke to Mexican Indians, as did the red belt about her waist, which indicates that she is pregnant. (Mark Lennihan/AP Photo.)

Each of the world's major religions is organized according to more or less standardized practices and beliefs, and each is practiced in a similar fashion by millions, even billions, of adherents worldwide. Yet many people also express their religious faith in individual ways. Rituals and prayers can be adapted to fit particular circumstances or performed at home alone. Some religions, including the Taoic religions of East Asia, as well as Hinduism and Buddhism, are largely individual or family-oriented practices. Some people do not observe a widely recognized religion at all. They may be secular, holding no religious beliefs, or express skepticism—even hostility—toward organized religion. They may consider themselves to be faithful but not follow an organized expression of their beliefs. Or they may practice an unconventional belief system, or cult. The term *cult* is often used in a pejorative sense because it conjures images of mind control, mass suicide, and extreme veneration of a human leader. It is important to keep in mind that the practitioners of belief systems falling outside of the mainstream—for example, Mormonism, Scientol-

ogy, and even Alcoholics Anonymous—strongly object to being labeled cult members.

Different types of religion exist in the world. One way to classify them is to distinguish between proselytic and ethnic faiths. **Proselytic religions**, such as Christianity and Islam, actively seek new members and aim to convert all humankind. For this reason, they are sometimes also referred to as **universalizing religions**. They instruct their faithful to spread the Word to all the Earth using persuasion and sometimes violence to convert the “heathen.” The colonization of peoples and their lands is sometimes a result of the desire to convert them to the conqueror’s religion. By contrast, each **ethnic religion** is identified with a particular ethnic or tribal group and does not seek converts. Judaism provides an

proselytic religions
Religions that actively seek new members and aim to convert all humankind.

universalizing religions
Also called proselytic religions, they expand through active conversion of new members and aim to encompass all of humankind.

ethnic religion
A religion identified with a particular ethnic or tribal group; does not seek converts.

monotheistic religion
The worship of only one god.

polytheistic religion
The worship of many gods.

and Christianity, believe in only one God and may expressly forbid the worship of other gods or spirits. **Polytheistic religions** believe there are many gods. For example, Vodun

Finally, the distinction between syncretism and orthodoxy is important. **Syncretic religions** combine elements of two or more different belief systems. Umbanda, a religion practiced in parts of Brazil, blends elements of Catholicism with a reverence for the souls of Indians, wise men, and historical Brazilian figures, along with a dash of nineteenth-century European spiritism, which is a set of beliefs about contacting spirits through mediums. Caribbean and Latin American religious practices often combine elements of European, African, and indigenous American religions. Sometimes, in order to continue practicing their religions, people in this region would hide statues of Afrocentric deities within images of Catholic saints. Or they would determine which Catholic figures were most like their own deities. Note in **Figure 7.2** the equation of Danbala, the

syncretic religions
Religions, or strands within religions, that combine elements of two or more belief systems.

syncretic religions
Religions, or strands within religions, that combine elements of two or more belief systems.



orthodox religions

Strands within most major religions that emphasize purity of faith and are not open to blending with other religions.

snake-god of Haitian Voudou, with Saint Patrick, who is also associated with snakes. **Orthodox religions**, by contrast, emphasize purity of faith and are generally not open to blending with elements

of other belief systems. The word *orthodoxy* comes from Greek and literally means “right” (*ortho*) “teaching” (*doxy*). Many religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam, have orthodox strains. So, for instance, although some orthodox Jews closely follow a strict interpretation of the Oral Torah (a specific version of the Jewish holy book), moderate but committed Jews may observe only some or perhaps none of the dietary, marriage, and worship proscriptions observed by orthodox Jews. Intolerance of other religions, or of those fellow believers not seeming to follow the “proper” ways, is associated with **fundamentalism**

rather than orthodoxy. Many who consider themselves orthodox are in fact quite tolerant of other beliefs (see Subject to Debate).

The importance of religion to the contemporary study of cultural geography will be explored through our five themes. First, religious beliefs differ from one place to another, producing spatial variations that can be mapped as culture regions. Second, a high degree of mobility is characteristic of religions as they have spread historically through conquest, trade, and missionary activity. Violent conquests, diasporas, and the geographic expansion of religions through conversion have all played a role in shaping the contemporary world map of religious belief. Pilgrimages, too, illustrate how people can literally be set in

fundamentalism

A movement to return to the founding principles of a religion, which can include literal interpretation of sacred texts, or the attempt to follow the ways of a religious founder as closely as possible.



Subject to Debate

Religious Fundamentalism

Throughout history, religions have been one of the main ways in which people have attempted to make sense of the changing world around them. Although we may associate globalization with the fast pace and seemingly shrinking world of the past 30 years or so, people from diverse cultures have in fact been in contact across the globe for thousands of years. So how have religions helped people to cope with the changes brought by new ideas, new ways of doing things, and new belief systems?

One response is acceptance. The Muslim conquest of Iberia in the eighth century brought a centuries-long flourishing of culture to modern-day Spain and Portugal. Islamic rule here was noted for its humane and enlightened nature, whereas the rest of western Europe languished in the Dark Ages. The Muslims who ruled Iberia were renowned for their religious tolerance, and they included Jews and Christians as valued members of their governmental, scientific, and artistic communities.

Another response is intolerance. When Buddhism branched off from Hinduism, its parent religion, not all Hindus were pleased at the way Buddhism replaced Hinduism in some areas. Angkor Wat (see Figure 12.19, page 452), a temple complex in Cambodia, is replete with bas-relief carvings of Buddha figures with their faces either entirely chipped off or recarved to resemble Hindu deities. Hindus intolerant of the Khmer King

Jayavarman VII's Buddhist beliefs were responsible for defacing these sacred images on the king's death in A.D. 1220.

Today many religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam, are experiencing intense fundamentalist movements. Fundamentalism means a return to the founding principles of a religion, which may include a literal interpretation of sacred texts and an attempt to follow the ways of a religious founder as closely as possible. Fundamentalists draw a sharp distinction between themselves and other practitioners of their religion, whom they do not believe to be following the proper religious principles, and between themselves and adherents of other faiths. Fundamentalism can be seen as an attempt to purify religious belief and practice in the face of modern influences that are thought to debase the religion. These tendencies have led to fundamentalists being regarded as antimodern and intolerant, although this view is strongly disputed by fundamentalists themselves.

Fundamentalism is an emotionally charged term because it is often used to portray its followers derogatorily as radical extremists. The tendency of the U.S. media to use the term *Islamic fundamentalists* as a synonym for *terrorists* is an unfortunate example of this. Yet there are connections between politics and religious fundamentalism. The political agenda of the U.S. government on matters of abortion, adoption, marriage, foreign policy, domestic security, gay rights, and the curriculum in public schools has been

motion through religion. Third, the global spread of religious beliefs has led to the reach of some religions, such as Hinduism, beyond their traditional hearths, whereas other religions, such as Judaism, have become diluted in part through migration-related diffusion. Religions, like all elements of cultural geography, must either adapt, or not, to the globalizing world. But religions influence globalization as well; here we will consider the faith-based dimensions of the Internet. Fourth, the natural environment frequently plays an important part in faith-based belief structures, either because the forces of nature are viewed as potentially negotiable or because features of the natural landscape, such as rivers and mountains, are thought to exert a powerful influence over human destinies. Thus, the nature-culture dimension of religion is a key aspect of its cultural geography. Fifth, and finally, religious beliefs are often visible on

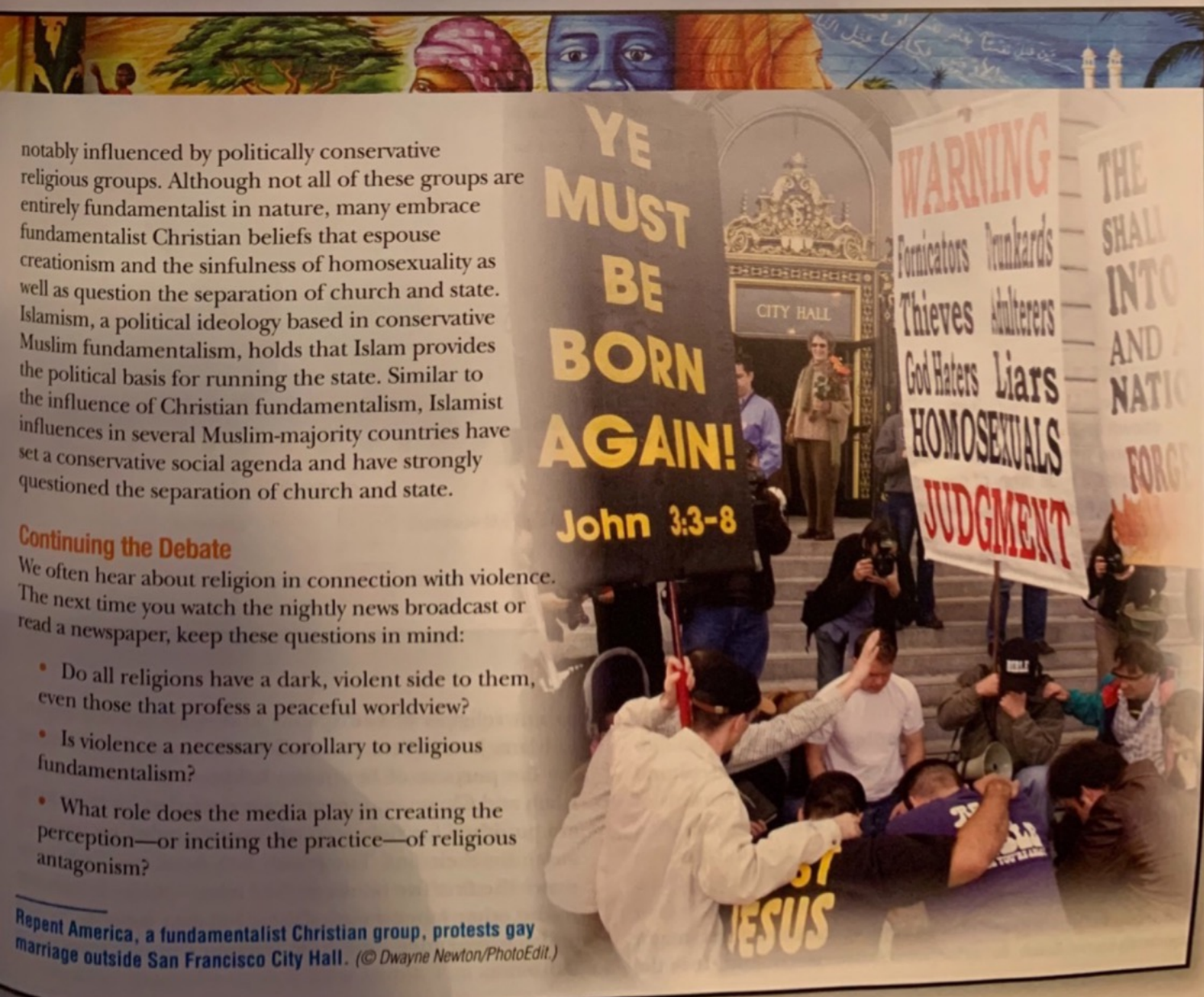
the cultural landscape. For example, religious architecture, such as mosques, temples, and shrines, literally marks the landscape with the imprint of particular religious beliefs. How the spiritual shaping of some spaces as sacred comes about is an important statement about what, and who, matters, culturally speaking.



Region

What is the spatial patterning of religious faiths? Because religion, like all of culture, has a strong territorial tie, religious culture regions abound.

The most basic kind of formal religious culture region depicts the spatial distribution of organized religions



notably influenced by politically conservative religious groups. Although not all of these groups are entirely fundamentalist in nature, many embrace fundamentalist Christian beliefs that espouse creationism and the sinfulness of homosexuality as well as question the separation of church and state. Islamism, a political ideology based in conservative Muslim fundamentalism, holds that Islam provides the political basis for running the state. Similar to the influence of Christian fundamentalism, Islamist influences in several Muslim-majority countries have set a conservative social agenda and have strongly questioned the separation of church and state.

Continuing the Debate

We often hear about religion in connection with violence. The next time you watch the nightly news broadcast or read a newspaper, keep these questions in mind:

- Do all religions have a dark, violent side to them, even those that profess a peaceful worldview?
- Is violence a necessary corollary to religious fundamentalism?
- What role does the media play in creating the perception—or inciting the practice—of religious antagonism?

Repent America, a fundamentalist Christian group, protests gay marriage outside San Francisco City Hall. (© Dwayne Newton/PhotoEdit.)

Major Religions

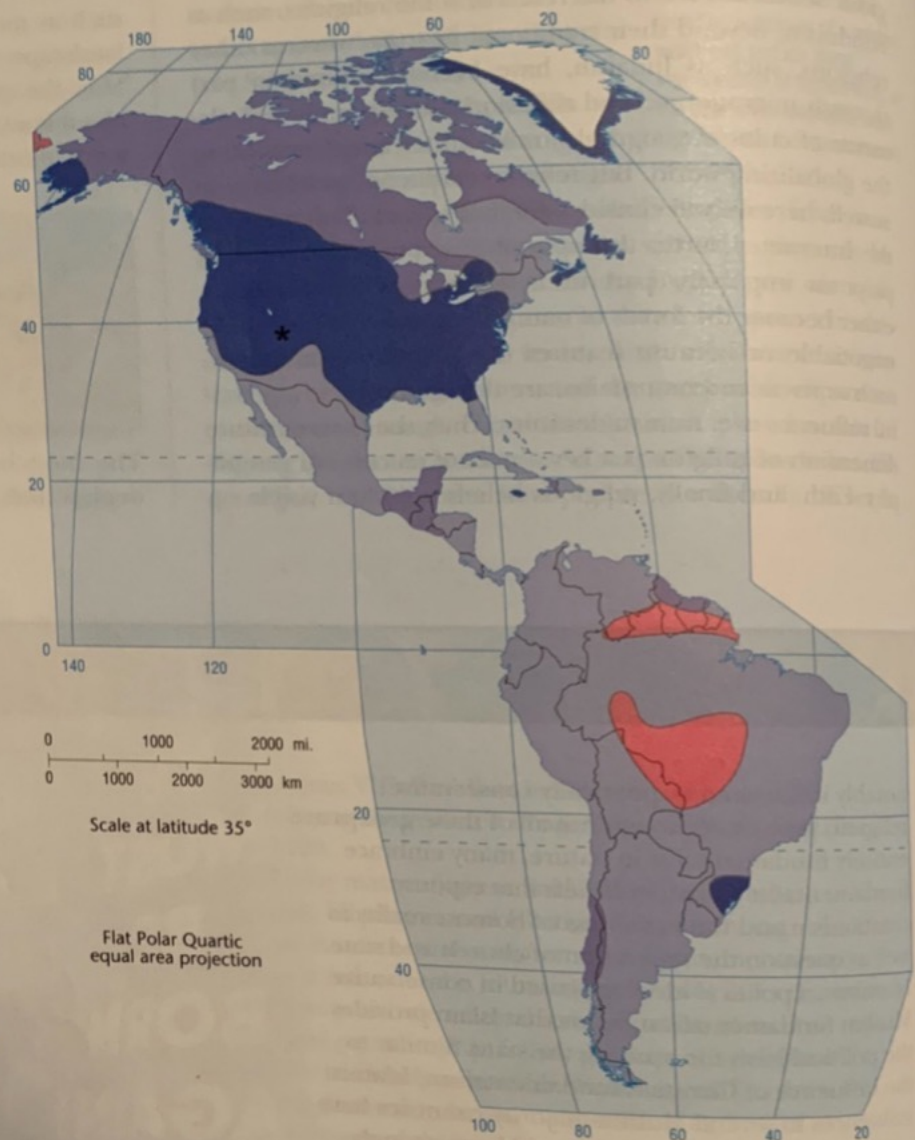
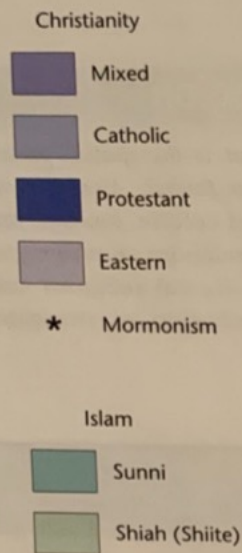


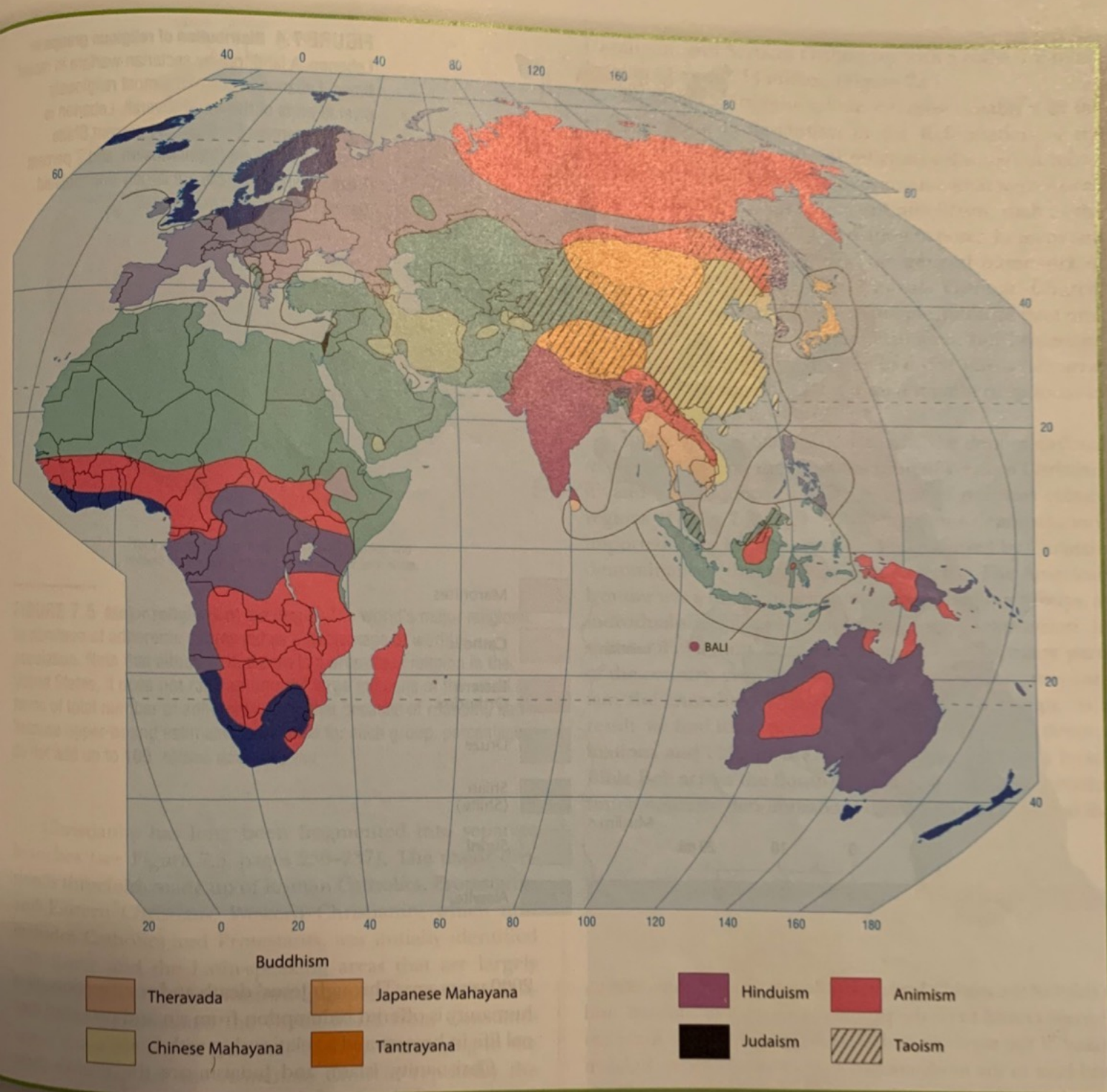
FIGURE 7.3 The world distribution of major religions. Much overlap exists that cannot be shown on a map of this scale. The attempt is to show which faith is dominant. "Animism" includes a wide array of diverse belief systems. Taoistic areas are cross-hatched to show the overlap with Buddhism in these areas. "Mixed" Christianity means that none of the three major branches of that faith has a majority.

(Figure 7.3). Some parts of the world exhibit an exceedingly complicated pattern of religious adherence, and the boundaries of formal religious culture regions, like most cultural borders, are rarely sharp (Figure 7.4, page 238). Persons of different faiths often live in the same province or town.

Judaism

Judaism is a 4000-year-old religion and the first major monotheistic faith to arise in southwestern Asia. It is the

parent religion of Christianity and is also closely related to Islam. Jews believe in one God who created humankind for the purpose of bestowing kindness on them. As with Islam and Christianity, people are rewarded for their faith, are punished for violating God's commandments, and can atone for their sins. The Jewish holy book, or *Torah*, comprises the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. In contrast to the other monotheistic faiths, Judaism is not proselytic and has remained an ethnic religion through most of its existence.



Judaism has split into a variety of subgroups, partly as a result of the Diaspora, a term that refers to the forced dispersal of the Jews from Palestine in Roman times and the subsequent loss of contact among the various colonies. Jews, scattered to many parts of the Roman Empire, became a minority group wherever they went. In later times, they spread throughout much of Europe, North Africa, and Arabia. Those Jews who lived in Germany and France before migrating to central and eastern Europe are known as the Ashkenazim; those who never left the Middle East and North

Africa are called Mizrachim; and those from Spain and Portugal are known as Sephardim. Spain expelled its Sephardic Jews in 1492, the same year that Christopher Columbus set sail for the New World. It was not until the quincentennial of both events, in 1992, that the Spanish government issued an official apology for the expulsion.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed large-scale Ashkenazic migration from Europe to America. The Holocaust that befell European Judaism during the Nazi years involved the systematic murder of perhaps

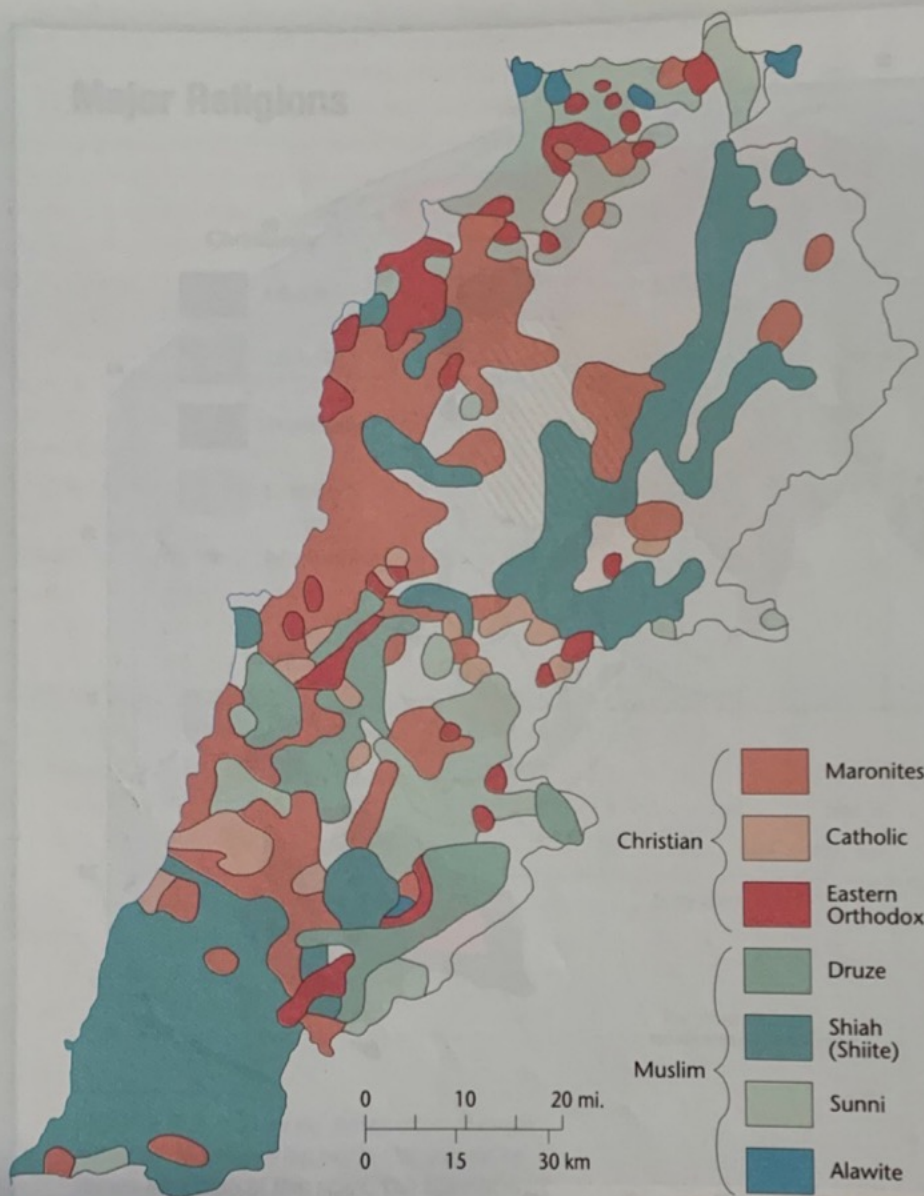


FIGURE 7.4 Distribution of religious groups in Lebanon. A land torn by sectarian warfare in recent times, Lebanon is one of the most religiously diverse parts of the world. Overall, Lebanon is today 37 percent Christian, 34 percent Shiite Muslim, 21 percent Sunni Muslim, and 7 percent Druze. Unshaded areas are largely unpopulated. (Derived, with changes, from Klaer, 1996.)

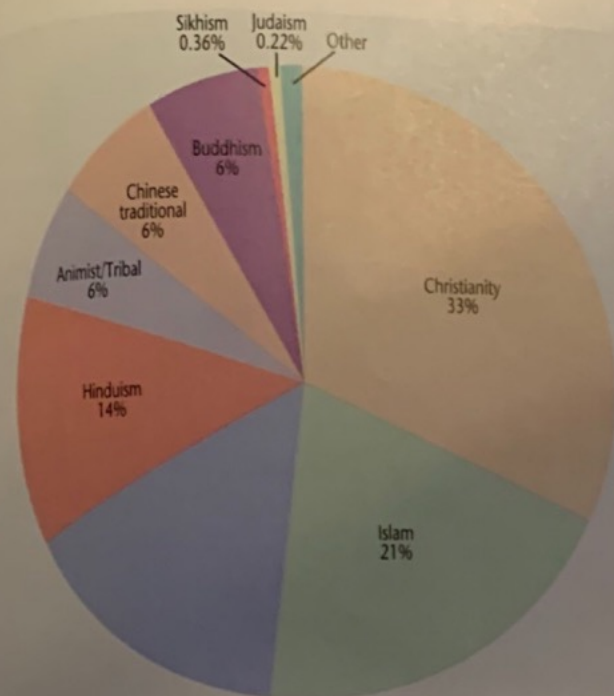
a third of the world's Jewish population, mainly Ashkenazim. Europe ceased to be the primary homeland of Judaism, and many of the survivors fled overseas, mainly to the Americas and later to the newly created state of Israel. Today, Judaism has about 13 million adherents throughout the world. At present, roughly 6 million, or a little less than half, live in North America, and slightly more than 5 million live in Israel.

Christianity

Christianity, a proselytic faith, is the world's largest religion, both in area covered and in number of adherents, claiming about a third of the global population (Figure 7.5). Christians are monotheistic, believing that God is a Trinity consisting of three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is believed to be the incarnate Son of God who was given to humankind for the sake of redemption some

2000 years ago. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, all of humanity is offered redemption from sin and provided eternal life in heaven and a relationship with God.

Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are the world's three great monotheisms and share a common culture hearth in southwestern Asia (see Figure 7.14, page 245). All three religions venerate the patriarch Abraham and thus can be called Abrahamic religions. Because Judaism is the parent religion of Christianity, the two faiths share many elements, including the Torah, the first five books of what Christians call the Old Testament (which forms part of the Christian Bible or holy book); prayer; and a clergy. This is the basis for the term *Judeo-Christian*, which is used to describe beliefs and practices shared by the two faiths. Because Jesus was born into the Jewish faith, many Christians still accord Jews a special status as a chosen people and see Christianity as the natural continuation or fulfillment of Judaism.



Total adds up to more than 100% due to rounding and because upper-bound estimates were used for each group.

FIGURE 7.5 Major religions of the world. The world's major religions, by numbers of adherents expressed as a percentage of world population. Note that although Judaism is a prominent religion in the United States, it does not rank among the large religions of the world in terms of total number of adherents. Note that because of rounding and because upper-bound estimates were used for each group, percentages do not add up to 100. (Source: *adherents.com*.)

Christianity has long been fragmented into separate branches (see Figure 7.3, pages 236–237). The major division is threefold, made up of Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Eastern Christians. Western Christianity, which now includes Catholics and Protestants, was initially identified with Rome and the Latin-speaking areas that are largely congruent with modern western Europe, whereas the Eastern Church dominated the Greek world from Constantinople (now the city of Istanbul, Turkey). Belonging to the Eastern group are the Armenian Church, reputedly the oldest in the Christian faith and today centered among a people of the Caucasus region; the Coptic Church, originally the religion of Christian Egyptians and still today a minority faith there, as well as being the dominant church among the highland people of Ethiopia; the Maronites, Semitic descendants of seventh-century heretics who disagreed with some of early Christianity's beliefs and retreated to a mountain refuge in Lebanon (see Figure 7.4); the Nestorians, who live in the mountains of the Middle East and in India's Kerala state; and Eastern Orthodoxy, originally centered in Greek-speaking areas. Having converted many Slavic groups, Eastern Orthodoxy is today comprised of a variety of national churches, such as Russian, Greek,

Ukrainian, and Serbian Orthodoxy, with a collective membership of some 214 million (Figure 7.6).

Western Christianity splintered, most notably with the emergence of Protestantism in the Reformation of the 1400s and 1500s. As with all religious reformation movements, Protestantism sought to overcome what were viewed to be wrong practices of Roman Catholicism, such as the need for priestly or saintly mediation between humans and God, while still staying within the general framework of Christianity. Since then, the Roman Catholic Church, which alone includes 1.1 billion people, or more than one-sixth of humanity, has remained unified; but Protestantism, from its beginnings, tended to divide into a rich array of sects, which together have a total membership today of about 470 million worldwide.

In the United States and Canada, the denominational map vividly reflects the fragmentation of Western Christianity and the resulting complex pattern of religious culture regions (Figure 7.7, page 240). Numerous denominations imported from Europe were later augmented by Christian denominations that originated in America. The American frontier was a breeding ground for new religious groups, as individualistic pioneer sentiment found expression in splinter Protestant denominations. Today, in many parts of the country, even a relatively small community may contain the churches of half a dozen religious groups. As a result, we find today about 2000 different religious denominations and cults in the United States alone. In a broad Bible Belt across the South, Baptist and other conservative fundamentalist denominations dominate, and Utah is at the



FIGURE 7.6 Greek Orthodox Monastery. The bells of St. John's Monastery in Patmos, Greece. (Courtesy of Patricia L. Price.)

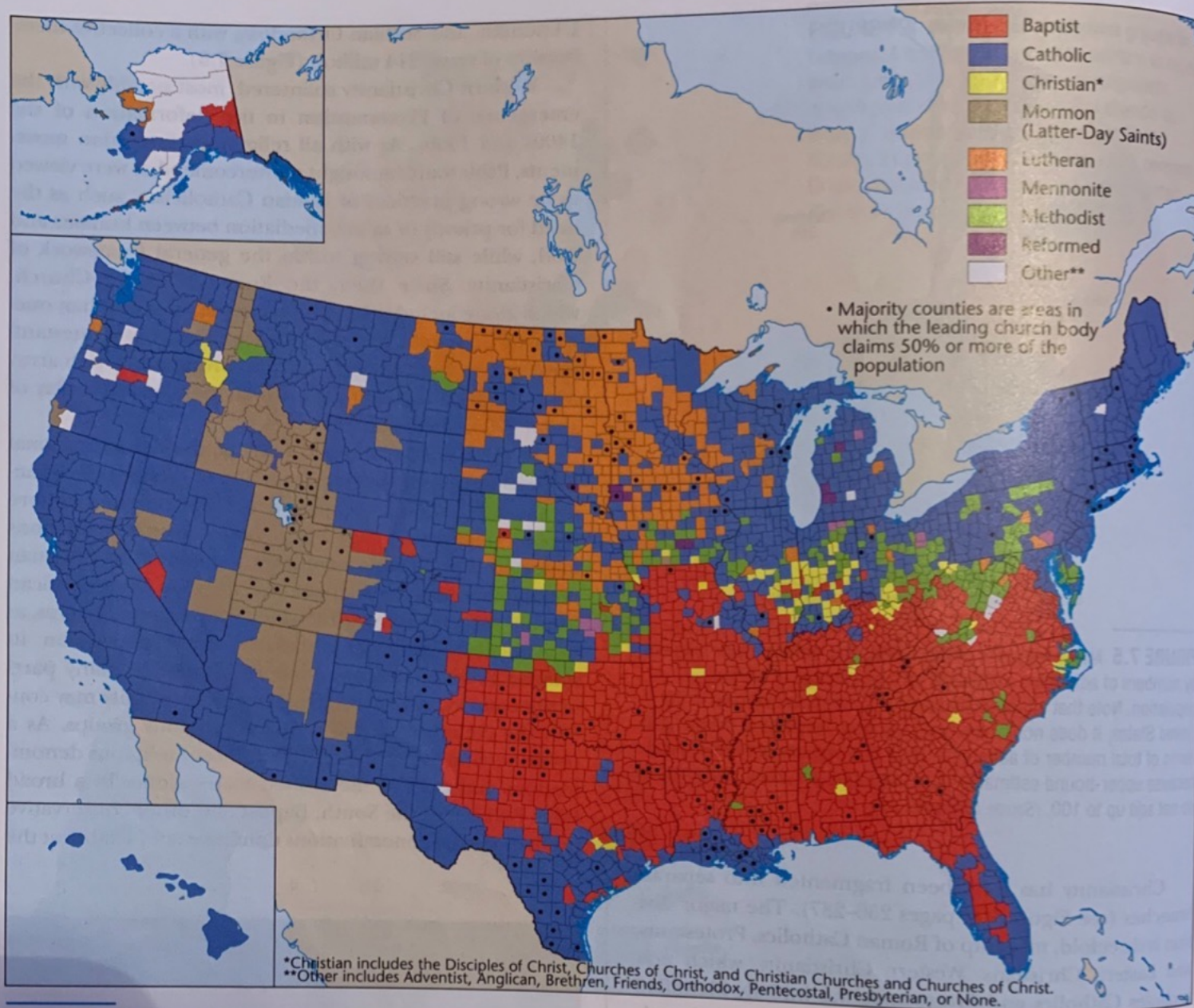


FIGURE 7.7 Leading Christian denominations in the United States, shown by counties. In the majority counties, the church or denomination indicated claimed 50 percent or more of the total church membership. The most striking features of the map are the Baptist dominance through the South, a Lutheran zone in the upper Midwest, Mormon (Latter-Day Saints) dominance in the interior West, and the zone of mixing in the American heartland. **Why do you think that so much of the western United States shows an adherence to Catholicism?** (Source: Jon T. Kilpinen, Valparaiso University; <http://www.valpo.edu/geomet/geo/courses/geo200/religion.html>. Data from Glenmary Research Center and U.S. Census.)

core of the Mormon realm. A Lutheran belt stretches from Wisconsin westward through Minnesota and the Dakotas, and Roman Catholicism is dominant in southern Louisiana, the southwestern borderland, and the heavily industrialized areas of the Northeast. The Midwest is a thoroughly mixed zone, although Methodism is the largest single denomination.

Today, Christianity is geographically widespread and highly diverse in its local interpretation. Although it is not as fast-growing as Islam, intense missionary efforts strive to

increase the number of adherents. Because of this proselytic work, Africa and Asia are the fastest-growing regions for Christianity.

Islam

Islam, another great proselytic faith, claims more than a billion followers, largely in the desert belt of Asia and northern Africa and in the humid tropics as far east as Indonesia and the southern Philippines (see Figures 7.3, pages 236–237,



FIGURE 7.8 Muslims at prayer in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. (Kazuyoshi Nomachi/Pacific Press Service.)

and 7.5, page 239). Adherents of Islam, known as Muslims (literally, “those who submit to the will of God”), are monotheists and worship one absolute God known as Allah. Islam was founded by Muhammad, considered to be the last and most important in a long line of prophets. The word of Allah is believed to have been revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel (Jibrail) beginning in A.D. 610 of the Christian calendar in the Arabian city of Mecca (**Figure 7.8**). The Qur’an, Islam’s holy book, is the text of these revelations and also serves as the basis of Islamic law, or sharia. Most Muslims consider both Jews and Christians to be, like themselves, “people of the Book,” and all three religions share beliefs in heaven, hell, and the resurrection of the dead. Many biblical figures familiar to Jews and Christians, such as Moses, Abraham, Mary, and Jesus, are also venerated as prophets in Islam. Adherents to Islam are expected to profess belief in Allah, the one God whose prophet was Muhammad; pray five times daily at established times; give alms, or *zakat*, to the poor; fast from dawn to sunset in the holy month of Ramadan; and make at least one pilgrimage, if possible, to the sacred city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. These duties are known as the Five Pillars of the faith.

Although not as severely fragmented as Christianity, Islam, too, has split into separate groups. Two major divisions prevail. Shiite Muslims, 16 percent of the Islamic total in diverse subgroups, form the majority in Iran and Iraq. Shiites believe that Ali, who was Muhammad’s son-in-law, should have succeeded Muhammad. Sunni Muslims, who represent the Islamic orthodoxy (the word *Sunni* comes from *sunnah*, meaning “tradition”), form the large majority worldwide (see Figure 7.3). Islam has not undergone a

reformation parallel to that undergone by Christianity with Protestantism. However, liberal movements within Sunni and Shiite Islam do have reformation as their goal.

Islam’s strength is greatest in the Arabic-speaking lands in Southwest Asia and North Africa, although the world’s largest Islamic population is found in Indonesia. Other large clusters live in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and western China. Because of successful conversion efforts in non-Muslim areas and high birthrates in predominantly Muslim areas, Islam is the fastest-growing world religion. In the United States, more people convert to Islam than to any other religion, and Islam will soon surpass Judaism to become America’s second-largest faith.

Hinduism

Hinduism, a religion closely tied to India and its ancient culture, claims about 800 million adherents (see Figures 7.3 and 7.5). Hinduism is a decidedly polytheistic religion. Although Hindus recognize one supreme god, Brahman, it is his many manifestations that are worshipped directly. Some principal Hindu deities include Vishnu, Shiva, and the mother goddess Devi. Ganesha, the elephant-headed god depicted in **Figure 7.9** (page 242), is often revered by Hindu university students because Ganesha is the god of wisdom, intelligence, and education. Believing that no one faith has a monopoly on the truth, most Hindus are notably tolerant of other religions (see Subject to Debate, page 234).

Hindus strive to locate the harmonious and eternal truth, *dharma*, which is within each human being. Social divisions, or castes, separate Hindu society into four major cate-



FIGURE 7.9 Ganesha. The elephant-headed god of wisdom, intelligence, and education is revered by many Hindu university students. (Punit Puranjpe/Reuters/Landov.)

gories, or *varna*, based on occupational categories: priests (Brahmins), warriors (Kshatriyas), merchants and artisans (Vaishyas), and workers (Shudras). Castes are related to dharma inasmuch as dharma implies a set of rules for each varna that regulate their behaviors with regard to eating, marriage, and use of space. All Hindus also share a belief in reincarnation, the idea that, although the physical body may die, the soul lives on and is reborn in another body. Related to this is the notion of *karma*. Karma can be viewed almost as a causal law, which holds that what an individual experiences in this life is a direct result of that individual's thoughts and deeds in a past life. Likewise, all thoughts and deeds, both good and bad, affect an individual's future lives. Ultimately

moksha, or liberation of the soul from the cycle of death and rebirth, will occur when the worldly bonds of the material self fall away and one's pure essence is freed. *Ahimsa*, or the principle of nonviolence, involves veneration of all forms of life. This implies a principle of noninjury to all sentient creatures, which is why many Hindus are vegetarians.

Hinduism has splintered into diverse groups, some of which are so distinctive as to be regarded as separate religions. Jainism, for instance, is an ancient outgrowth of Hinduism, claiming perhaps 4 million adherents, almost all of whom live in India, and traces its roots back more than 25 centuries. Although they reject Hindu scriptures, rituals, and priesthood, the Jains share the Hindu belief in ahimsa and reincarnation. Jains adhere to a strict asceticism, a practice involving self-denial and austerity. For example, they practice veganism, a form of vegetarianism that prohibits the consumption of all animal-based products, including milk and eggs. Sikhism, by contrast, arose much later, in the 1500s, in an attempt to unify Hinduism and Islam. Centered in the Punjab state of northwestern India, where the Golden Temple at Amritsar serves as the principal shrine, Sikhism has about 23 million followers. Sikhs are monotheistic and have their own holy book, the *Adi Granth*.

No standard set of beliefs prevails in Hinduism, and the faith takes many local forms. Hinduism includes very diverse peoples. This is partly a result of its former status as a proselytic religion. A Hindu majority on the Indonesian island of Bali suggests the religion's former missionary activity (Figure 7.10). Today, most Hindus consider their religion an ethnic one, whereby one is acculturated into the Hindu community by birth; however, conversion to Hinduism is also allowed.

Buddhism

Hinduism is the parent religion of Buddhism, which began 25 centuries ago as a reform movement based on the teachings of Prince Siddhartha Gautama, "the awakened one" (Figure 7.11). He promoted the four "noble truths": life is full of suffering, desire is the cause of this suffering, cessation of suffering comes with the quelling of desire, and an Eightfold Path of proper personal conduct and meditation permits the individual to overcome desire. The resultant state of enlightenment is known as *nirvana*. Those few individuals who achieve nirvana are known as Buddhas. The status of Buddha is open to anyone regardless of social status, gender, or age. Because Buddhism derives from Hinduism, the two religions share many beliefs, such as dharma, reincarnation, and ahimsa. Buddhism and its parent religion, Hinduism, as well as the related faiths Jainism and Sikhism, are known as dharmic religions.

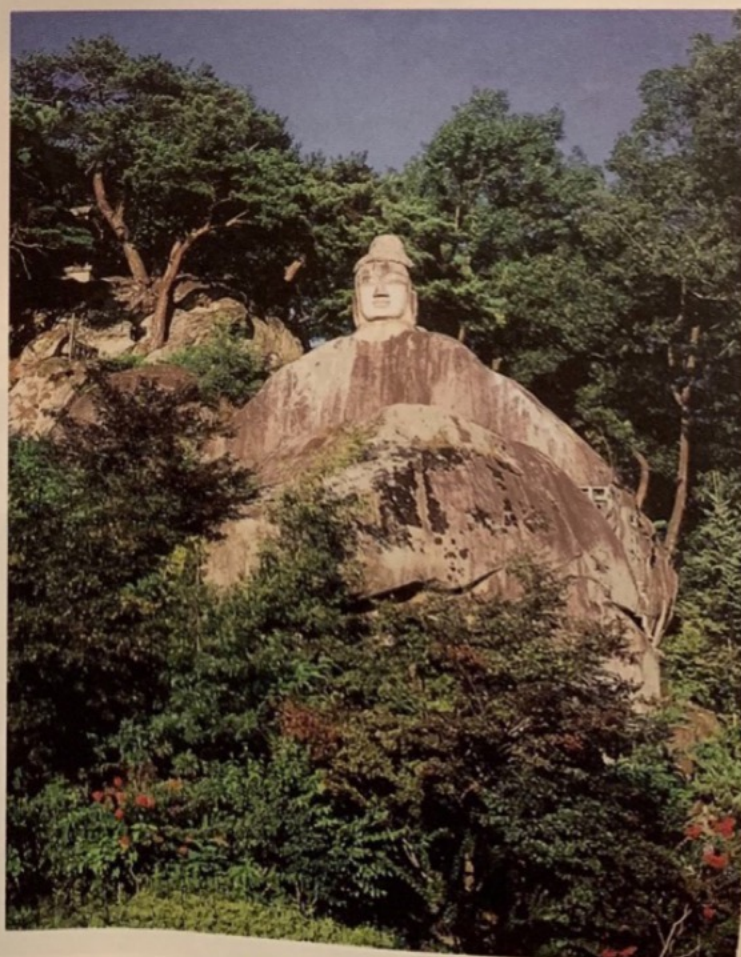
Today, Buddhism is the most widespread religion in South and East Asia, dominating a culture region stretch-



FIGURE 7.10 Hindu temple in Bali, Indonesia. Besakih, known as the Mother Temple of Bali, is the largest Hindu temple complex on the island, occupying the slopes of Mount Agung. (Courtesy of Patricia L. Price.)

ing from Sri Lanka to Japan and from Mongolia to Vietnam. In the process of its proselytic spread, particularly in China and Japan, Buddhism fused with native ethnic religions such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism to form syncretic faiths that fall into the Mahayana division of Buddhism. Southern, or Theravada, Buddhism, dominant in Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia, retains the greatest similarity to the religion's original form, whereas a variation known as Tantrayana, or Lamaism, prevails in Tibet and Mongolia (see Figure 7.3, pages 236–237). Buddhism's tendency to merge with native religions, particularly in China, makes it difficult to determine the number of its adherents. Estimates range from 350 million to more than 500 million people (see Figure 7.5, page 239). Although Buddhism in China has become mingled with local faiths to become part of a composite ethnic religion, elsewhere it remains one of the three great proselytic religions in the world, along with Christianity and Islam.

FIGURE 7.11 Buddhism is one of the religious faiths of South Korea. Here an image of the Buddha is carved from a rocky bluff to create sacred space and a local pilgrimage shrine. (Courtesy of Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov.)



Taoic Religions

Confucianism, Shinto, and Taoism together make up the faiths that center on Tao, or the force that balances and orders the universe. Derived from the teachings of philosopher Kung Fu-tzu (551–479 B.C.), Confucianism was later promoted by China's Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) as the official state philosophy. Thus, it has bureaucratic, ethical, and hierarchical overtones that have led some to question whether it is more a way of life than a religion in the proper sense. In China, Confucianism's formalism is balanced by Taoism's romanticism. Taoism, which is both an established religion and a philosophy, emphasizes the dynamic balance depicted by the Chinese yin/yang symbol. The "three jewels of Tao" are humility, compassion, and moderation. Shinto, once the state religion of Japan, has long been blended with Buddhism, as well as infused with a Confucian-derived legal system, but at its core Shinto is an animistic religion. Because Tao is found in nature, there is some overlap with the animistic faiths discussed next. In addition, because of their fluid nature, Taoic religions tend toward syncretism and have blended with other faiths, particularly Buddhism. People may simultaneously practice elements of all of these faiths. For these reasons, it is difficult to provide an exact number of adherents, although estimates hold there to be about half a billion. Taoic religions center on East Asia (see Figure 7.3).

Animism/Shamanism

Peoples in diverse parts of the world often retain indigenous religions and are usually referred to collectively as

animists (Figure 7.12). For the most part, animists do not form organized or recognized religious groups but instead practice as ethnic religions common to clans or tribes. In addition, most animists follow oral, rather than written, traditions and thus do not have holy books. A tribal religious figure, called by some a shaman, usually serves as an intermediary between the people and the spirits.

Currently numbering perhaps 240 million, animists believe that nonhuman beings and inanimate objects possess spirits or souls. These spirits are believed to live in rocks and rivers, on mountain peaks and celestial bodies, in forests and swamps, and even in everyday objects. As such, objects are considered to be alive, and, depending on the local beliefs, objects and animals may assume human forms or engage in human activities such as speech. For some animists, the objects in question do not actually possess spirits but rather are valued because they have a particular potency to serve as a link between a person and the omnipresent god. Followers of Wicca, a contemporary neopagan religion derived from pre-Christian European practices of reverence for the mother goddess and the horned god, worship the god and goddess who are thought to inhabit everything. Ritual tools used by Wiccans include the *athame* (dagger), *boline* (knife), and *besom* (broom), which are used in ceremonies to direct energy as practitioners communicate with the god and goddess.

Animistic elements can also pervade established religions. Japanese Shinto adherents worship *kami*, or spirits,

animists

Adherents of animism, the idea that souls or spirits exist not only in humans but also in animals, plants, rocks, natural phenomena such as thunder, geographic features such as mountains or rivers, or other entities of the natural environment.

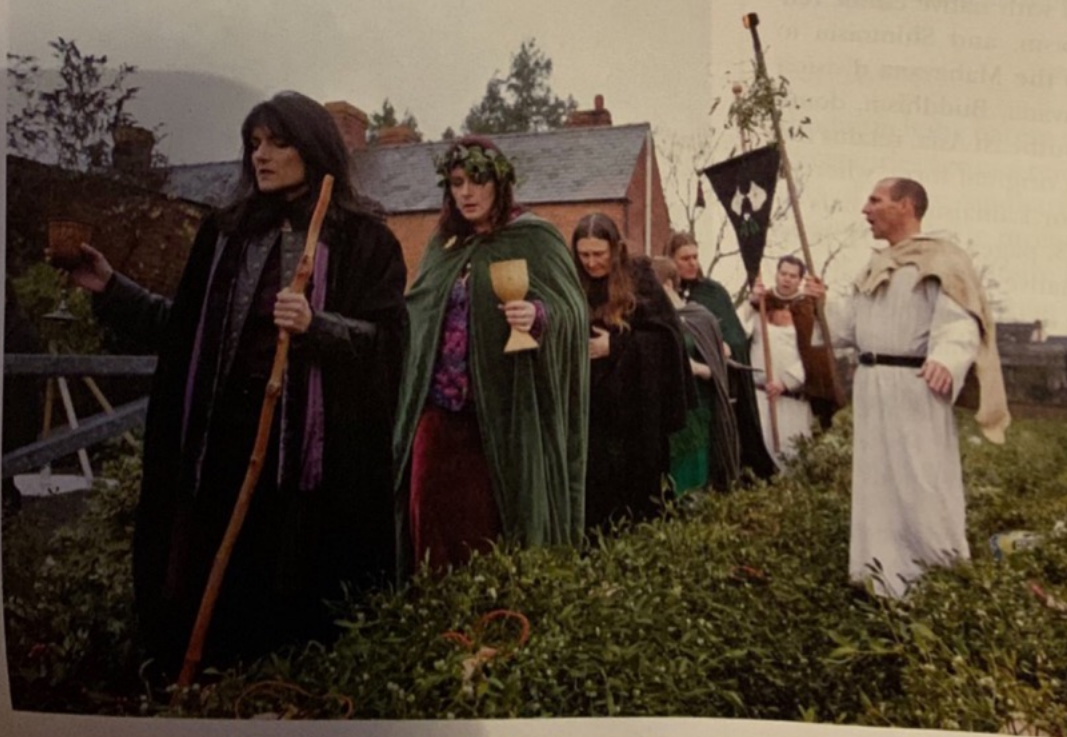
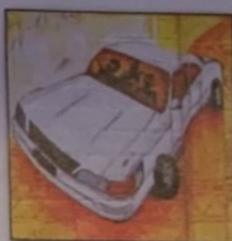


FIGURE 7.12 Druids from the Mistletoe Foundation bless mistletoe in Worcestershire, England. Celtic Druids have their roots in the ancient, pre-Christian reverence for natural elements such as streams, hills, and plants. Mistletoe is sacred to the Druidic faith. (Andrew Fox/Corbis.)



FIGURE 7.13 Pet grave marker. Pumpkin the cat was apparently baptized into the Christian faith and now lies at rest in Pet Haven Cemetery in Miami, Florida. (Courtesy of Patricia L. Price.)

that inhabit natural objects such as waterfalls and mountains. We should not classify such systems of belief as primitive or simple because they can be extraordinarily complex. Even in places such as the United States, where the majority of the inhabitants would not see themselves as animists, such beliefs are pervasive. For example, many people in the United States believe that their pets possess souls that ascend to heaven on death (Figure 7.13).



Mobility

How did the geographical distribution of religions and denominations, of regions and places, come about? Why do religions mandate or encourage mobility

through pilgrimage? The spatial patterning of religions, denominations, and secularism is the product of innovation and cultural diffusion. To a remarkable degree, the origin of the major religions was concentrated spatially in three principal culture hearth areas (Figure 7.14).



FIGURE 7.14 The origin and diffusion of five major world religions. Christianity and Islam, the two great proselytic monotheistic faiths, arose in Semitic southwestern Asia and spread widely through the Old World. Hinduism and Buddhism both originated in the northern reaches of the Indian subcontinent and spread throughout southeastern Eurasia. Taoic religions originated in East Asia, relocating with Chinese and Japanese migration regionally and, more recently, to North and South America.

culture hearth

A focused geographic area where important innovations are born and from which they spread.

A **culture hearth** is a focused geographic area where important innovations are born and from which they spread. Many religions mandate

periodic return of the faithful to these culture hearths in order to confirm or renew their faith.

The Semitic Religious Hearth

All three of the great monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—arose among Semitic peoples who lived in or on the margins of the deserts of southwestern Asia, in the Middle East (see Figure 7.14, page 245). Judaism, the oldest of the three, originated some 4000 years ago. Only gradually did its followers acquire dominion over the lands between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River—the territorial core of modern Israel. Christianity, whose parent religion is Judaism, originated here about 2000 years ago. Seven centuries later, the Semitic culture hearth once again gave birth to a major faith when Islam arose in western Arabia, partly from Jewish and Christian roots.

Religions spread by both relocation and expansion diffusion. Recall from Figure 1.8 (page 10) that expansion diffusion can be divided into hierarchical and contagious subtypes. In hierarchical diffusion, ideas become implanted at the top of a society, leapfrogging across the map to take root in cities and bypassing smaller villages and rural areas. Because their main objective is to convert nonbelievers, proselytic faiths are more likely to diffuse than ethnic religions, and it is not surprising that the spread of monotheism was accomplished largely by Christianity and Islam, rather than Judaism. From Semitic southwestern Asia, both of the proselytic monotheistic faiths diffused widely, as shown in Figure 7.14.

Christians, observing the admonition of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew—"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you"—initially spread through the Roman Empire, using the splendid system of imperial roads to extend the faith. In its early centuries of expansion, Christianity displayed a spatial distribution that clearly reflected hierarchical diffusion (Figure 7.15). The early congregations were established in cities and towns, temporarily producing a pattern of Christianized urban centers and pagan rural areas. Indeed, traces of this process remain in our language. The Latin word *pagus*, "countryside," is the root of both *pagan* and *peasant*, suggesting the ancient connection between non-Christians and the countryside.

The scattered urban clusters of early Christianity were created by such missionaries as the apostle Paul, one of

Jesus' disciples who moved from town to town bearing the news of the emerging faith. In later centuries, Christian missionaries often used the strategy of converting kings or tribal leaders, setting in motion additional hierarchical diffusion. The Russians and Poles were converted in this manner. Some Christian expansion was militaristic, as in the reconquest of Iberia from the Muslims and the invasion of Latin America. Once implanted in this manner, Christianity spread farther by means of contagious diffusion. When applied to religion, this method of spread is called **contact conversion** and is the result of everyday associations between believers and nonbelievers.

contact conversion
The spread of religious beliefs by personal contact.

The Islamic faith spread from its Semitic hearth area in a predominately militaristic manner. Obeying the command in the Qur'an that they "do battle against them until there be no more seduction from the truth and the only worship be that of Allah," the Arabs expanded westward across North Africa in a wave of religious conquest. The Turks, once converted by the Arabs, carried out similar Islamic conquests. In a different sort of diffusion, Muslim missionaries followed trade routes eastward to implant Islam hierarchically in the Philippines, Indonesia, and the interior of China. Tropical Africa is the current major scene of Islamic expansion, an effort that has produced competition with Christians for the conversion of animists. As a result of missionary successes in sub-Saharan Africa and high birthrates in its older sphere of dominance, Islam has become the world's fastest-growing religion in terms of the number of new adherents.

The Indus-Ganges Religious Hearth

The second great religious hearth area lay in the plains fringing the northern edge of the Indian subcontinent. This lowland, drained by the Ganges and Indus rivers, gave birth to Hinduism and Buddhism. Hinduism, which is at least 4000 years old, was the earliest faith to arise in this hearth. Its origin apparently lay in Punjab, from which it diffused to dominate the subcontinent, although some historians believe that the earliest form of Hinduism was introduced from Iran by emigrating Indo-European tribes about 1500 B.C. Missionaries later carried the faith, in its proselytic phase, to overseas areas, but most of these converted regions were subsequently lost to other religions.

Branching off from Hinduism, Buddhism began in the foothills bordering the Ganges Plain about 500 B.C. (see Figure 7.14). For several centuries it remained confined to the Indian subcontinent, but missionaries later carried the religion to China (100 B.C. to A.D. 200), Korea and Japan (A.D. 300 to 500), Southeast Asia (A.D. 400 to 600), Tibet



FIGURE 7.15 The diffusion of Christianity in Europe, first to eleventh centuries.

(A.D. 700), and Mongolia (A.D. 1500). Buddhism developed many regional forms throughout Asia, except in India, where it was ultimately accommodated within Hinduism.

The diffusion of Buddhism, like that of Christianity and Islam, continues to the present day. Some 2 million

Buddhists live in the United States, about the same number as Episcopalians. Mostly, their presence is the result of relocation diffusion by Asian immigrants to the United States, where immigrant Buddhists outnumber Buddhist converts by three to one.

The East Asian Religious Hearth

Kong Fu-tzu and Lao Tzu, the respective founders of Confucianism and Taoism, were contemporaries who reputedly once met with each other. Both religions were adopted widely throughout China only when the ruling elite promoted them. In the case of Confucianism, this was several centuries after the master's death. During his life, Kong Fu-tzu wandered about with a small band of disciples trying to convince rulers to put his ideas on good governance into practice. But he was shunned even by lowly peasants, who criticized him as "a man who knows he cannot succeed but keeps trying." Thus, early attempts at contagious diffusion were unsuccessful, whereas hierarchical diffusion from politicians and schools eventually spread Confucianism from the top down. Taoism, as well, did not gain wide acceptance until it was promoted by the ruling Chinese elite.

After 1949, China's communist government officially repressed organized religious expression, dismissing it as a relic of the past. In other words, the government attempted to erect an absorbing barrier that would not only halt the spread of religion but would also erase it from Chinese public and private life. As noted in Chapter 1, absorbing barriers are rarely completely successful, and this example is no exception. Although temples were converted to secu-

lar uses, and even looted and burned, religion was driven underground rather than eradicated. After the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), which aimed to purify Chinese society of bourgeois excesses such as religion, tolerance for religious expression grew. However, the Chinese Communist Party's official stance still holds that religious and party affiliations are incompatible; thus, some party officials are reluctant to divulge their religious status. This, combined with the fact that many Chinese practice elements of several Taoic faiths simultaneously, makes the precise enumeration of adherents difficult.

Taoism and Confucianism have spread with the Chinese people through trade and military conquest. Thus, people in Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, along with mainland China, practice these beliefs or at least have been influenced by them. Today, Chinese and Japanese migrants alike have relocated their belief systems across the globe, as the image of the Tsubaki Shinto Shrine in Washington State shown in [Figure 7.16](#) confirms.

Reflecting on Geography

Why, in the entire world, did only three culture hearths produce so many major religious faiths?



FIGURE 7.16 Shinto shrine in the United States. With the migration of Japanese people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly to the West Coast of the United States, Shinto traditions and religious structures followed. This image depicts the Tsubaki Shrine in Granite Falls, Washington. (© Alexander Marten Zhang.)



FIGURE 7.17 Religious pilgrims. Visitors number in the millions annually and can provide a holy site's main source of revenue. *Upper left:* the grotto where the Virgin Mary appeared to a girl in 1858 in Lourdes, France. *Lower left:* the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok, Thailand. *Above:* the Great Mosque in Touba, Senegal. (*Upper left:* Franz-Peter Tschauner/dpa/Corbis; *Lower left:* Kevin R. Morris/Corbis; *Above:* Richard List/Corbis.)

Religious Pilgrimage

pilgrimages
Journeys to places of religious importance.

For many religious groups, journeys to sacred places, or **pilgrimages**, are an important aspect of

faith-based mobility (Figure 7.17). Pilgrimages are typical of both ethnic and proselytic religions. They are particularly significant for followers of Islam, Hinduism, Shintoism, and Roman Catholicism. Along with missionaries, pilgrims constitute one of the largest groups of people voluntarily on the move for religious reasons. Pilgrims do not aim to convert people to their faith through their journeys. Rather, they enact in their travels a connection with the sacred spaces of their faith. Indeed, some religions man-

date pilgrimage, as is the case with Islam, where pilgrimage to Mecca forms one of the Five Pillars.

The sacred places visited by pilgrims vary in character. Some have been the setting for miracles; a few are the regions where religions originated or areas where the founders of the faith lived and worked; others contain sacred physical features such as rivers, caves, springs, and mountain peaks; and still others are believed to house gods or are religious administrative centers where leaders of the religion reside. Examples include the Arabian cities of Mecca and Medina in Islam, which are cities where Muhammed resided and thus form Islam's culture hearth; Rome, the home of the Roman Catholic pope; the French

town of Lourdes, where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to a girl in 1858; the Indian city of temples on the holy Ganges River, Varanasi, a destination for Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain pilgrims; and Ise, a shrine complex located in the culture hearth of Shintoism in Japan. Places of pilgrimage might be regarded as places of spatial convergence, or nodes, of functional culture regions.

Religion provides the stimulus for pilgrimage by offering those who participate the purification of their souls or the attainment of some desired objective in their lives, by mandating pilgrimage as part of devotion, or by allowing the faithful to connect with important historic sites of their faith. For this reason, pilgrims often journey great distances to visit major shrines. Other sites of lesser significance draw pilgrims only from local districts or provinces. Pilgrimages can have tremendous economic impact because the influx of pilgrims is a form of tourism.

In some localities, the pilgrim trade provides the only significant source of revenue for the community. Lourdes, a town of about 16,000, attracts between 4 million and 5 million pilgrims each year, many seeking miraculous cures at the famous grotto where the Virgin Mary reportedly appeared. Not surprisingly, among French cities, Lourdes ranks second only to Paris in number of hotels, although most of these are small. Mecca, a small city, annually attracts millions of Muslim pilgrims from every corner of the Islamic culture region as they perform the *hajj*, or Fifth Pillar of Islam, which all able-bodied Muslims who can afford the journey are encouraged to perform at least once in their lifetime. By land, by sea, and (mainly) by air, the faithful come to this hearth of Islam, a city closed to all non-Muslims (Figure 7.18).



FIGURE 7.18 Religious segregation. Access to Mecca is restricted, allowing Muslims only. The Saudi Arabian government believes that permitting non-Muslim tourists to visit Mecca and Medina would disturb the sanctity of these sacred places. (vario images GmbH & Co. KG/Alamy.)

Such mass pilgrimages obviously have a major impact on the development of transportation routes and carriers, as well as other provisions such as inns, food, water, and sanitation facilities.



Globalization

How has religion adapted to globalization? To what degree is religion relevant in today's global world? Religion is seen by many people as providing

a stable anchor, one that is particularly necessary amidst the flux and turmoil that characterizes globalization. Religious customs, meetings, and obligations serve to form a strong basis of community. Typically, these communities are experienced locally; however, through long-distance pilgrimage, the faithful from across the globe may gather together in one place. Today's increased mobility and communication make possible religious communities at a truly global scale.

The Rise of Evangelical Protestantism in Latin America

As economic, social, and political changes occur in places, cultural forces such as religion must adapt. For instance, in Chapter 4 we saw how languages change over time in response to immigration, urbanization, and trade-based exchanges. At other times, cultural forces drive changes in politics, economics, and societies. In Chapter 5, we saw how Hispanic immigration to the United States has resulted in major shifts in consumption, political behavior, and social attitudes.

A good example of how the cultural, economic, social, and political arenas work together is provided by the contemporary religious landscape of Latin America and the Caribbean. In this region, Roman Catholicism has dominated the religious landscape since the time of the Iberian conquerors in the late 1400s. More Catholics live in this region than in any other on Earth, with three out of every five Catholics residing here. Brazil is the largest Catholic country in the world in terms of population, with more than 120 million adherents. However, the Catholic Church has been on the decline in Brazil and throughout the region in recent decades. Less than 80 percent of Brazilians are Catholics today, whereas 50 years ago that figure was more than 95 percent. What has happened to the region's Catholics?

Briefly, more and more Latin Americans believe that the Catholic Church has failed to keep in touch with the needs and concerns of contemporary urban societies. Birth



FIGURE 7.19 Protestant storefront church. This Pentecostal church, Igreja o Brasil para Cristo, is one of the fastest-growing evangelical Protestant churches in Brazil. The garage-front arrangement shown here is located in the mining town of Lencois. Some of the 25 worshippers at this service went into a trance. (Ponkawonka.)

control, divorce, and persistent poverty are issues that are simply not addressed by Roman Catholicism to the satisfaction of many Latin Americans. As a result, more and more are turning to evangelical Protestant faiths, such as the Seventh-Day Adventist and Pentecostal churches (Figure 7.19). The focus of these churches on thrift, sobriety, and resolving problems directly rather than through the mediation of priests is appealing to many. Others find their needs are best addressed by an array of African-based spiritist religions, which include Umbanda, Candomblé, and Santería. Whether Catholicism will ultimately reform from within to become more current, or whether it will continue to lose out to rival denominations, is a key question in regard to the Latin American and Caribbean religious landscape.

Religion on the Internet

In the mid-fifteenth century, Gutenberg's printing press made the Bible available to a mass audience. The Internet, proponents argue, represents a similar technological revolution, one that will inevitably attract new adherents to religious faiths. Gathering together regularly in a holy place—a mosque, temple, church, or shrine—is at the

heart of most organized religions. Traditionally, people have come together to receive sacraments, sing, pray, and celebrate major life events in houses of worship. With the tens of thousands of religious web sites now in existence, it is no longer necessary to physically go to a place of worship. Rather, you can sit in front of a computer, at any time of the day or night, and read a holy book, submit and read online prayers, engage in theological debate, or watch broadcasts of religious services. A survey conducted by the Pew Foundation found that the number of Internet users seeking religious or spiritual information online grew 94% from 2000 to 2002, more than any other category of Internet use except for online banking.

For cultural geographers, the most interesting dimension of online worship concerns what it does to the role of place in a global society. Clearly, the Internet has made it possible to practice religion in a way that is not linked to a specific place of worship, but is this a good thing? Supporters of practicing religion online contend that it is because people can become members of virtual communities that would not otherwise have been available to them in times of spiritual need. Now illness, invalidism, or the pressures of a busy life need not present a barrier to worship. Detractors argue that solitary worship online erodes the place-based communities

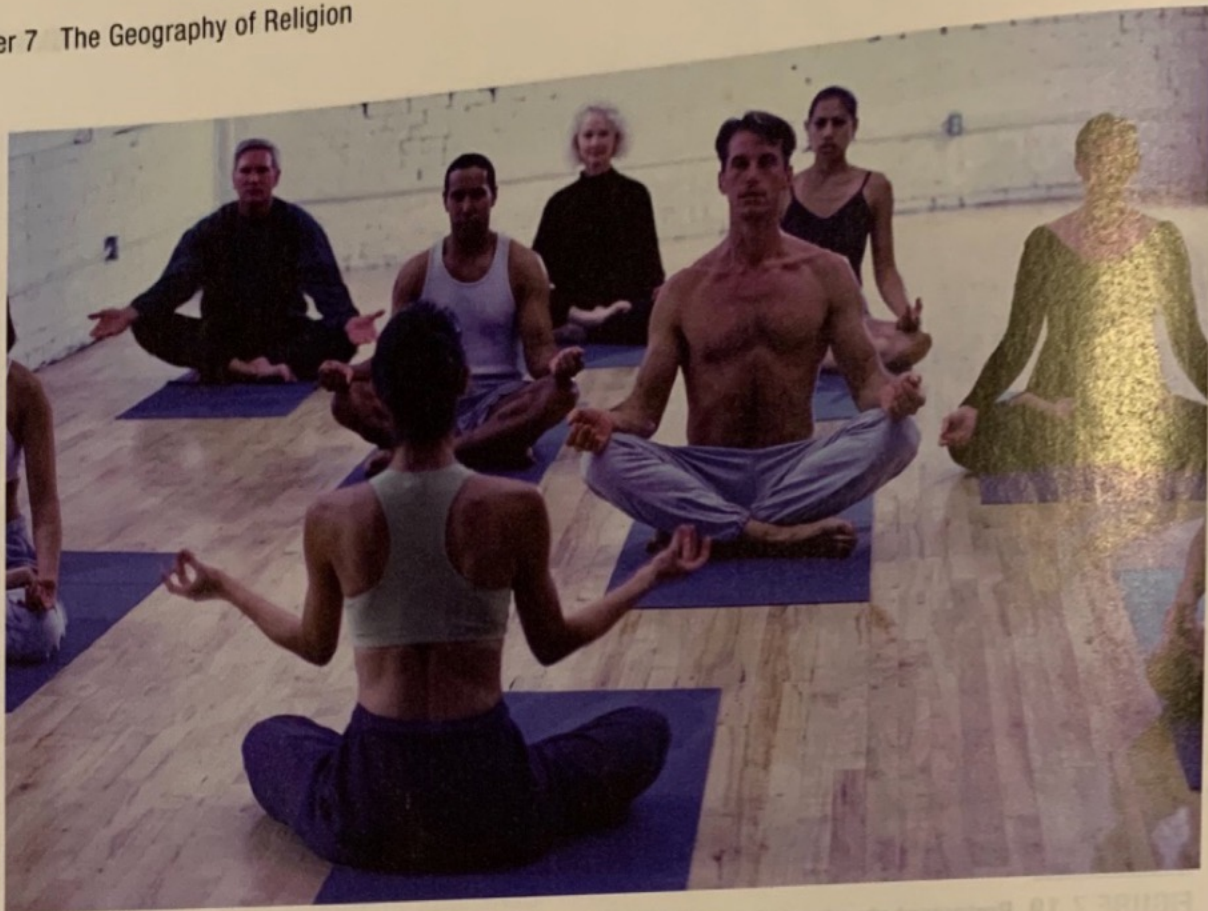


FIGURE 7.20 *Yoga class in session.* Many people in the United States have incorporated Hindu and Buddhist spiritual practices into their lives. (Ryan McVay/Getty Images.)

that are at the heart of many religions. Recall from Chapter 1 that debates center on whether globalization dilutes the role of place and of place-based differences that make up the human mosaic. As people pick and choose elements from the different faiths available online, will religions converge into a watered-down, homogeneous “McFaith”?

Reflecting on Geography

Are virtual religious communities created through the Internet an acceptable substitute for traditional place-based religious communities?

Religion's Relevance in a Global World

Geographer Roger Stump points to a twentieth-century trend toward fragmentation and dominance of particular religions in regions of the United States. Baptists in the South, Lutherans in the upper Midwest, Catholics in the Northeast and Southwest, and Mormons in the West each dominate their respective regions more thoroughly today than at the turn of the twentieth century. Each of the four traditions is socially conservative and has a strong, long-standing infrastructure. Other experts, however, believe that American culture is becoming more religiously mixed, with weakening regional borders around religious core areas. Newer religious influences, too, are making an entrance onto the

American religious stage. For example, if you have ever practiced yoga or meditation, you are engaging in Hindu and Buddhist practices (**Figure 7.20**). Many Americans do yoga or meditate to enhance physical well-being and/or spiritual growth, to relieve stress, or even to keep up with the latest trends, rather than as part of a religious practice. Yet they are among the growing number of Americans who have found a blend of Eastern and Western religious practices to be compatible with their beliefs and lifestyles (**Figure 7.21**).

The number of nonreligious, secular persons in the world is estimated at 913 million at present (see **Figure 7.5**). Across the United States, the level of religious faith varies, as depicted in **Figure 7.22**. The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, released in 2008, found that 16.1 percent of Americans are not affiliated with any particular religion, while 5 percent of Americans do not believe in God or a universal spirit. In some parts of the world, especially in much of Europe, religious affiliation has declined, giving way to *secularization* (**Figure 7.23**, page 254). In some instances, the retreat from organized religion has resulted from a government's active hostility toward a particular faith or toward religion in general. The French government has long—since the French Revolution, in fact—discouraged public displays of religious faith. (France's long-standing secularism is evident on the map in **Figure 7.23**.) This extends not only to France's traditional Roman Catholicism but also to Jews and the rising

Supernatural Experiences and Beliefs

	Total %	Christians %
<i>% who have . . .</i>		
Been in touch with dead	29	29
Had ghostly experience	18	17
Consulted psychic	15	14
<i>% believe in . . .</i>		
Spiritual energy in trees, etc.	26	23
Astrology	25	23
Reincarnation	24	22
Yoga as a spiritual practice	23	21
Evil eye (i.e., casting of curses)	16	17
Sample size	2003	1589

FIGURE 7.21 Blending East and West. This survey demonstrates that a fair number of Christians hold beliefs and engage in practices that might be thought of as Eastern, such as reincarnation and yoga. Furthermore, some Christians said they had experienced supernatural phenomena, such as being in touch with the dead or having a ghostly experience. For many people, a blend of beliefs and practices characterizes their everyday lived experience of religious faith. (Source: www.pewforum.org.)

Muslim population. In 2004, French law banned the wearing of skullcaps, headscarves, or large crosses in public schools, and in 2011 burqas—veils worn by some Muslim women—were outlawed in all public areas. In other cases, we can attribute the decline in religious affiliation to the failure of

religions to meet the needs of rural folk cultures or to adapt to the contemporary urban scene, as we saw with Roman Catholicism in Latin America. Such patterns once again reveal the inherent spatial variety of humankind and invite analysis by the cultural geographer.

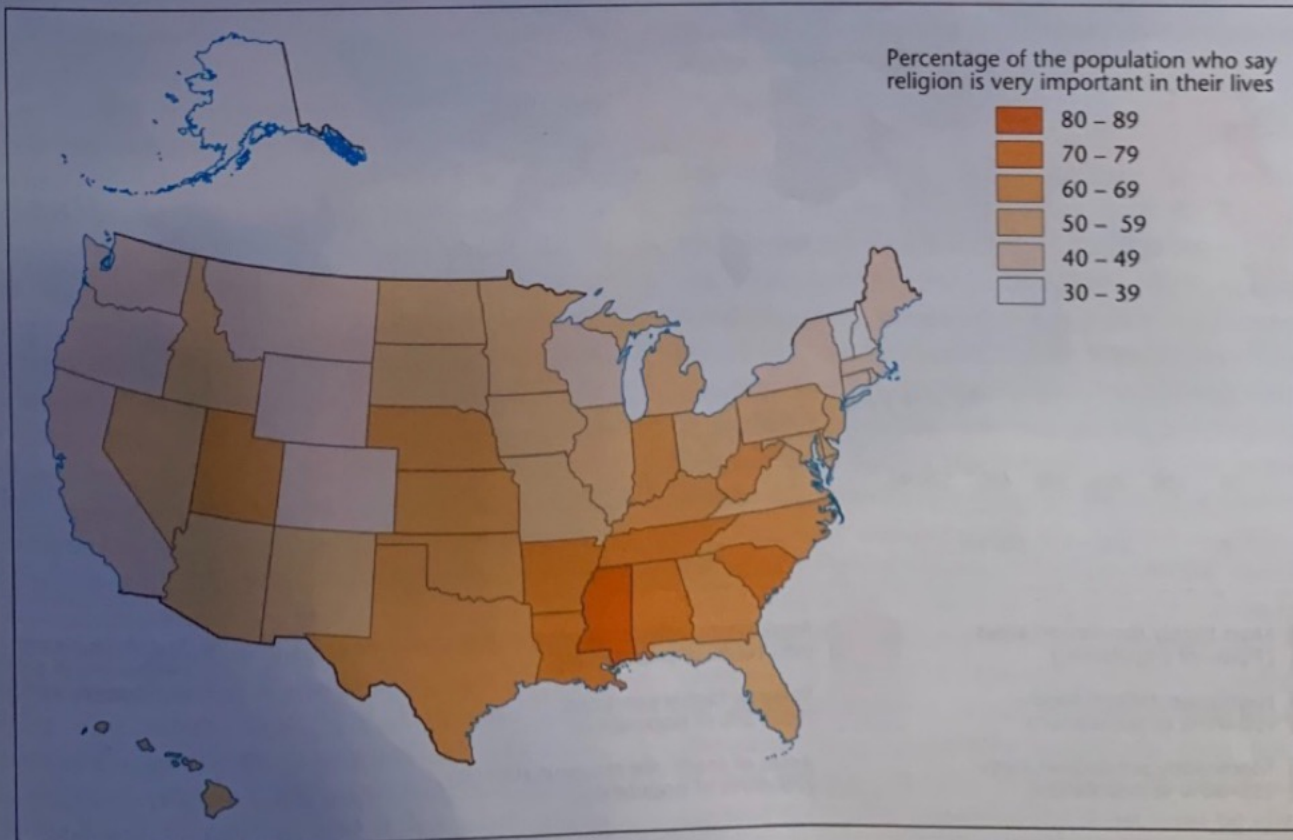


FIGURE 7.22 Importance of Religion. This map of the United States shows the percent of people in each state who said that religion is very important in their lives. *What factors might explain why this map shows these particular regional patterns?* (Source: www.pewforum.org.)

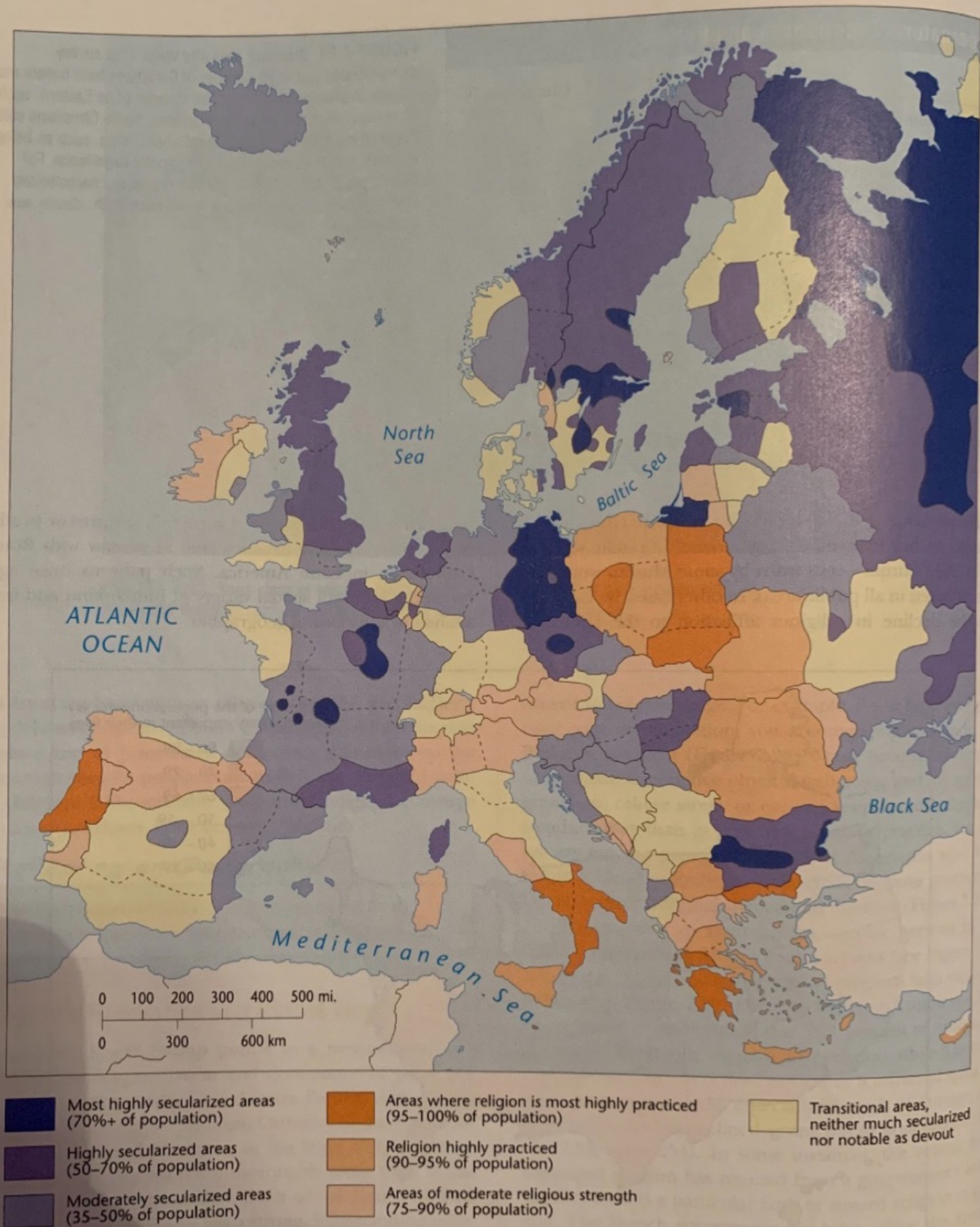


FIGURE 7.23 Secularized areas in Europe. These areas, in which Christianity has ceased to be of much importance, occur in a complicated pattern. *What causal forces might have been at work?* In all of Europe, some 190 million people report no religious faith, amounting to 27 percent of the population. (Source: Jordan-Bychkov and Jordan, 2002: 104.)

Nature-Culture

What is the relationship between religion and the natural habitat? How does religion impact our modification of the environment and shape our perception of

nature? Does the habitat influence religion? All these questions, and more, fit into the theme of cultural ecology.

Appeasing the Forces of Nature

One of the main functions of many religions is the maintenance of harmony between a people and their physical environment. Thus, religion is perceived by its adherents to be part of the **adaptive strategy** (one of the cultural tools needed to survive in a given environment); for that reason, physical environmental factors, particularly natural hazards and disasters, exert a powerful influence on the development of religions.

Environmental influence is most readily apparent in animistic faiths. In fact, an animistic religion's principal goal is to mediate between its people and the spirit-filled forces of nature. Animistic ceremonies are often intended to bring rain, quiet earthquakes, end plagues, or in some other way manipulate environmental forces by placating the spirits believed responsible for these events. Sometimes the link between religion and natural hazard is visual. The great pre-Columbian temple pyramid at Cholula, near Puebla in central Mexico, strikingly mimics the shape of the awesome nearby volcano Popocatepetl, which towers to the menacing height of nearly 18,000 feet (5500 meters).

Rivers, mountains, trees, forests, and rocks often achieve the status of sacred space, even in the great religions. The Ganges River and certain lesser streams such as the Bagmati in Nepal are holy to the Hindus, and the Jordan River has special meaning for Christians, who often transport its waters in containers to other continents for use in baptism (Figure 7.24). Most holy rivers are believed to possess soul-cleansing abilities. Hindu geographer Rana Singh speaks of the "liquid divine energy" of the Ganges "nourishing the inhabitants and purifying them."

Mountains and other high places likewise often achieve sacred status among both animists and adherents of the great religions (Figure 7.25, page 256). Mount Fuji is sacred in Japanese Shintoism, and many high places are revered in Christianity, including Mount Sinai. Some mountains tower so impressively as to inspire cults devoted exclusively to them. Mount Shasta, a massive snowcapped



FIGURE 7.24 Holy water from the Jordan River. This water is taken from the Jordan River, at the site where Jesus is thought to have been baptized by John the Baptist. It can be purchased and used in rituals. (Courtesy of Patricia L. Price.)

volcano in northern California, near the Oregon border, serves as the focus of no fewer than 30 New Age cults, the largest of which is the "I Am" religion, founded in the 1930s (see Figure 7.25, right). These cults posit that the Lemurians, denizens of a lost continent, established a secret city inside Mount Shasta. Geographer Claude Curran, who studied the Shasta cults, found that, although few of the adherents live near the mountain, pilgrimages and festivals held during the summer swell the population of nearby towns and contribute to the local economy.

Animistic nature-spirits lie behind certain practices found in the great religions. *Feng shui*, which literally means "wind and water," refers to the practice of harmoniously balancing the opposing forces of nature in the built environment. A feature of Asian religions that emphasizes Tao, the dynamic balance found in nature, feng shui involves choosing environmentally auspicious sites for locating houses, villages, temples, and graves. The homes of the living and the resting places of the dead must be aligned with the cosmic forces of the world in order to assure good luck, health, and prosperity. Although the practice of feng shui dates back some 7000 years, contemporary people practice

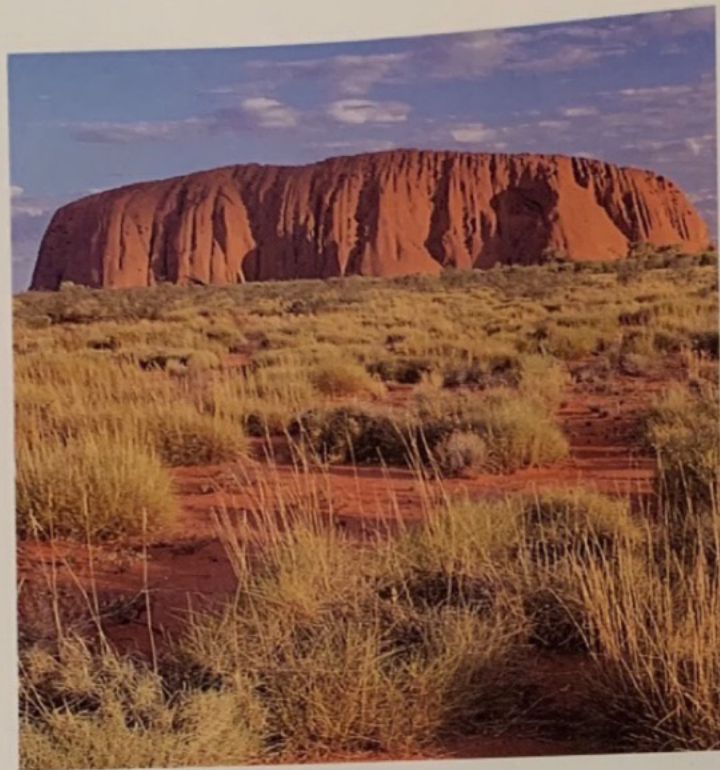


FIGURE 7.25 Two high places that have evolved into sacred space. *Left:* The reddish sandstone Uluru, or Ayers Rock, in central Australia is sacred in Aboriginal animism. *Right:* Snowy Mount Shasta in California is venerated by some 30 New Age cults (see Huntsinger and Fernández-Giménez, 2000.) **Why do mountains so often inspire such worship?** (*Left:* Michael Fogden/Bruce Coleman; *Right:* Joel Sartore/National Geographic.)

its principles. **Figure 7.26** depicts a high-rise condominium in Hong Kong's Repulse Bay neighborhood that incorporates feng shui principles in its design. The square opening in the building's center is said to provide passage to the bay for the dragon that dwells in the hill behind the building, allowing the dragon to drink from the waters of the bay and return to its abode unencumbered. Some Westerners have also adopted the principles of feng shui. Office spaces as well as homes are arranged according to its basic ideas. For example, artificial plants, broken articles, and paintings depicting war are thought to bring negative energy into living spaces and so should be avoided.

Although the physical environment's influence on the major Western religions is less pronounced, it is still evident. Some contemporary adherents to the Judeo-Christian tradition believe that God uses plagues to punish sinners, as in the biblical account of the 10 plagues inflicted on Egypt, which forced the Israelites into the desert. Modern-day droughts, earthquakes, and hurricanes are interpreted by some as God's punishment for wrongdoing, whereas others argue that this is not so. Environmental stress can, however, evoke a religious response not so different from that of animistic faiths. Local ministers and priests often attempt to alter unfavorable weather conditions with



FIGURE 7.26 Condominium in Hong Kong. The square opening in this building is supposed to allow for the passage of the dragon who resides in the hill behind. (Courtesy of Ari Dortsman.)

special services, and there are few churchgoing people in the Great Plains of the United States who have not prayed for rain in dry years.

The Impacts of Belief Systems on Plants and Animals

Every known religion expresses itself in food choices, to one degree or another. In some faiths, certain plants and livestock, as well as the products derived from them, are in great demand because of their roles in religious ceremonies and traditions. When this is the case, the plants or animals tend to spread or relocate with the faith.

For example, in some Christian denominations in Europe and the United States, celebrants drink from a cup of wine that they believe is the blood of Christ during the sacrament of Holy Communion. The demand for wine created by this ritual aided the diffusion of grape growing from the sunny lands of the Mediterranean to newly Chris-

tianized districts beyond the Alps in late Roman and early medieval times. The vineyards of the German Rhine were the creation of monks who arrived from the south between the sixth and ninth centuries. For the same reason, Catholic missionaries introduced the cultivated grape to California, in an example of relocation diffusion. In fact, wine was associated with religious worship even before Christianity arose. Vineyard-keeping and winemaking spread westward across the Mediterranean lands in ancient times in association with worship of the god Dionysus.

Religion also can often explain the absence of individual crops or domestic animals in an area. The environmentally similar lands of Spain and Morocco, separated only by the Strait of Gibraltar, show the agricultural impact of food taboos. On the Spanish, Roman Catholic side of the strait, pigs are common and pork a delicacy, but in Muslim Morocco on the African side, only about 12,000 swine can be found throughout the entire country. Islam's prohibition of pork explains this contrast. **Figure 7.27** maps the



FIGURE 7.27 Consumption and avoidance of pork are influenced by religion. Some religions and churches—such as Islam, Judaism, and Seventh-Day Adventism—prohibit the eating of pork. Cultural groups with a traditional fondness for pork include central Europeans and the Chinese. (Based in part on Simoons, 1994.)

pork taboo. Judaism also imposes restrictions against pork and other meats, as is stated in the following passage from the Book of Leviticus:

These shall ye not eat, of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof: . . . the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be cloven-footed, yet he cheweth not the cud; he is unclean unto you.

Religious taboos can even function as absorbing barriers, preventing diffusion of foods, drinks, and practices that violate the taboo. Mormons, who are encouraged to avoid caffeine, have not taken part in the American fascination with coffee. Sometimes these barriers are permeable. Certain Pennsylvania Dutch churches, for example, prohibit cigarette smoking but do not object to member farmers raising tobacco for sale in the commercial market.

The case of India's sacred cows provides an intriguing example of how religious beliefs shape the role of animals in society, in this instance avoiding the use of cows as food while emphasizing the animal's sacred as well as practical functions. Although only one out of every three of India's Hindus practices vegetarianism, almost none of India's Hindu population will eat beef, and many will not use leather. Why, in a populous country such as India where many people are poor and where food shortages have plagued regions of the country in previous decades, do people refuse to consume beef? There are several quite legitimate reasons. First, the dairy products provided by cow's milk and its by-products, such as yogurt and *ghee* (clarified butter), are central to many regional Indian cuisines. If the cow is slaughtered, it will no longer be able to provide milk. Second, in areas of the world that rely heavily on local agriculture for food production, such as India, cows provide valuable agricultural labor in tilling fields. Cows also provide free fertilizer in the form of dung. Finally, the value of the cow has been incorporated into Indian Hindu beliefs and practices over many centuries and has become a part of culture. Krishna, an incarnation of the major Hindu deity Vishnu, is said to be both the herder and the protector of cows. Nandi, who is the deity Shiva's attendant, is represented as a bull.

Think for a moment about what you consider appropriate to eat. Perhaps beef is part of your diet, but would you eat horsemeat? What is so different about a cow and a horse? Has the scare about mad cow disease affected your consumption of beef? Has the threat of so-called bird flu curtailed your poultry intake? How about dog or cat meat? What makes certain animals pets in some cultures and dinner in others? Through this sort of questioning, you may come to realize that practices that seem second nature—such as what you will and will not eat—are in fact

the result of long histories that are very different from place to place.

Ecotheology

Ecotheology is the name given to a rich and abundant body of literature studying the role of religion in habitat modification. More exactly, ecotheologians ask how the teachings and worldviews of religion are related to our attitudes about modifying the physical environment. In some faiths, human power over natural forces is assumed. The Maori people of New Zealand, for example, believe that humans represent one of six aspects of creation, the others being forest/animals, crops, wild food, sea/fish, and winds/storms. In the Maori worldview, people rule over all of these except winds/storms.

ecotheology

The study of the influence of religious belief on habitat modification.

The Judeo-Christian tradition also teaches that humans have dominion over nature, but it goes further, promoting the view that the Earth was created especially for human beings, who are separate from and superior to the natural world. This view is implicit in God's message to Noah after the Flood, promising that "every moving thing that lives shall be food for you, and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything." The same theme is repeated in the Book of Psalms, where Jews and Christians are told that "the heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the Earth he has given to the sons of men." Humans are not part of nature but separate, forming one member of a God-nature-human trinity.

Believing that the Earth was given to humans for their use, early Christian thinkers adopted the view that humans were God's helpers in finishing the task of creation, that human modifications of the environment were therefore God's work. Small wonder, then, that the medieval period in Europe witnessed an unprecedented expansion of agricultural acreage, involving the large-scale destruction of woodlands and the drainage of marshes. Nor is it surprising that Christian monastic orders, such as the Cistercian and Benedictine monks, supervised many of these projects, directing the clearing of forests and the establishment of new agricultural colonies.

Subsequent scientific advances permitted the Judeo-Christian West to modify the environment at an unprecedented rate and on a massive scale. This marriage of technology and theology is one cause of our modern ecological crisis. The Judeo-Christian religious heritage, in short, has for millennia promoted an instrumentalist view of nature that is potentially far more damaging to the habitat than an organic view of nature in which humans and nature exist in balance. Yet there is considerable evidence to the contrary. For example, the Orthodox Church in Russia is working to create wildlife preserves on monastery

lands. The Patriarch of Constantinople, leader of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, has made the fight against pollution a church policy, declaring that damaging the natural habitat constitutes a sin against God. The Church of England has declared that abuse of nature is blasphemous, and throughout the monotheistic religions, the green teachings of long-dead saints, such as Christianity's St. Francis of Assisi, who treasured birds and other wildlife, now receive heightened attention.

Indeed, the Judeo-Christian tradition is not lacking in concern for environmental protection. In the Book of Leviticus, for example, farmers are instructed by God to let the land lie fallow one year in seven and not to gather food from wild plants in that "Sabbath of the land." Robin Doughty, a humanistic cultural geographer, suggests that "Western Christian thought is too rich and complex to be characterized as hostile toward nature," although he feels that Protestantism, "in which worldly success symbolizes individual predestination," may be more conducive to "ecological intemperance." Beyond that, according to geographer Janel Curry-Roper, some fundamentalist Protestant sects herald ecological crisis and environmental deterioration as a sign of the coming Apocalypse, Christ's return, and the end of the present age. Thus, they welcome ecological collapse and, obviously, are unlikely to be of much help in solving the problem of environmental degradation.

Some conservative, fundamentalist Protestants, however, have adopted conservationist views, citing biblical

admonitions. The Flood story from the Old Testament, in which Noah saves diverse animals by bringing them onto the ark, is now viewed by many fundamentalists as a call to protect endangered species. An ecotheological focus underlies the multid denominational National Religious Partnership for the Environment, which includes many evangelical Protestant members. The hope is to mobilize the Christian Right against wanton environmental destruction in the same way in which they oppose abortion.

The great religions of southern and eastern Asia, and many animistic faiths, also highlight teachings and beliefs that protect nature. In Hinduism, for example, geographer Deryck Lodrick found that the doctrine of ahimsa had resulted in the establishment of many animal homes, refuges, and hospitals, particularly in the northwestern part of India. The hospitals, or *pinjrapoles*, are maintained by the Jains. In this view of the world, people are part of and at harmony with nature. Such religions would presumably not threaten the ecological balance.

However, real-world practices do not always reflect the stated ideals of religions. Both Buddhism and Hinduism protect temple trees but demand huge quantities of wood for cremations (Figure 7.28). Traditional Hindu cremations, for example, place the corpse on a pile of wood, cover it with more wood, and burn it during an open-air rite that can last up to six hours. The construction of funeral pyres is estimated to strip some 50 million trees from India's countryside annually. In addition, the ashes



FIGURE 7.28 Wood gathered for Hindu cremations at Pashupatinath, on the sacred river Bagmati in Nepal. These cremations contribute significantly to the ongoing deforestation of Nepal and reveal the underlying internal contradiction in Hinduism between conservation as reflected in the doctrine of ahimsa and sanctioned ecologically destructive practices. (Courtesy of Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov.)

are later swept into rivers, and the burning itself releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, contributing to the pollution of waterways and the atmosphere. The use of wood, and its placement on the ground, provides an important symbolic connection between the body and the earth. It does not, however, lead to efficient burning; on average, 880 pounds (400 kilograms) of wood is required to cremate a single corpse. A "green cremation system" is currently under development by a New Delhi-based nonprofit organization. By placing the first layer of wood on a grate, and placing a chimney over the pyre, wood use can be reduced by 75 percent. Although traditional Hindus balk at the notion of breaking with conventional practice, severe wood shortages and the escalating cost of wood will likely make green cremations an increasingly popular option in the future. As this example illustrates, the idea of a link between godliness and greenness is a global one. In the years following a conference in Italy in the mid-1980s—which brought together environmentalists and religious leaders representing Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism—some 130,000 projects have arisen linking the green teachings some see as inherent in these faiths to the ecology movement.

Ecofeminists have also entered this debate. They point out that the rise of the all-powerful male sky-deity of Semitic monotheism came at the expense of earth goddesses of fertility and sustainability. In their view, because the Judeo-Christian tradition elevated a sky-god remote from the Earth,



FIGURE 7.29 Bumper sticker. The "mother" in question is Mother Earth. (Courtesy of Jeffrey Gordon.)

the harmonious relationship between people and the habitat was disrupted. The ancient holiness of ecosystems perished, endangering huge ecoregions. The **Gaia hypothesis** possesses an ecofeminist spirit, wherein the Earth is seen as a mother figure who reacts to humankind's environmental depredations through a variety of self-regulating mechanisms. The popular "love your mother" bumper sticker displays an image of the planet Earth and is a humorous example of this notion (**Figure 7.29**).

Gaia hypothesis

The theory that there is one interacting planetary ecosystem, Gaia, that includes all living things and the land, waters, and atmosphere in which they live; further, that Gaia functions almost as a living organism, acting to control deviations in climate and to correct chemical imbalances, so as to preserve Earth as a living planet.



CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

In what forms does religion appear in the cultural landscape? How does the visibility of religion differ from one faith or denomination to another? Religion is a vital aspect of culture;

its visible presence can be quite striking, reflecting the role played by religious motives in the human transformation of the landscape. In some regions, the religious aspect is the dominant visible evidence of culture, producing sacred landscapes. At the opposite extreme are areas almost purely secular in appearance. Religions differ greatly in visibility, but even those least apparent to the eye usually leave some subtle mark on the countryside.

Religious Structures

The most obvious religious contributions to the landscape are the buildings erected to house divinities or to shelter

worshippers. These structures vary greatly in size, function, architectural style, construction material, and degree of ornateness (**Figure 7.30**, page 262). To Roman Catholics, for example, the church building is literally the house of God, and the altar is the focus of key rituals. Partly for these reasons, Catholic churches are typically large, elaborately decorated, and visually imposing. In many towns and villages, the Catholic house of worship is the focal point of the settlement, exceeding all other structures in size and grandeur. In medieval European towns, Christian cathedrals were the tallest buildings, representing the supremacy of religion over all other aspects of life.

For many Protestants—particularly the traditional Calvinistic chapel-goers of British background, including Presbyterians and Baptists—the church building is, by contrast, simply a place to assemble for worship. The result is an unsanctified, small, simple structure that appeals less to the senses and more to personal faith. For this reason, traditional Protestant houses of worship typically are not designed for comfort, beauty, or high visibility but instead

Patricia's Notebook

My Travels to Jerusalem



Patricia Price

One of the best things about being a geographer is that I always have a good excuse to travel the world! Among the most interesting places I have visited thus far is Israel. It's hard to think of any place on Earth where so much globally significant history, passion, and conflict are packed into such a small area. Because I'm a cultural geographer whose work emphasizes the humanistic theme of how it is that societies establish meaningful ties to places—in other words, how we dwell on Earth—I always have my eyes open for traces of meaning-making on the landscape.

In Jerusalem, for instance, you can walk the Via Dolorosa route, visiting all 14 Stations of the Cross walked by Jesus from his condemnation by the Romans to the site of his crucifixion and death. You can see the iconic golden Dome of the Rock on Jerusalem's Temple Mount, which

Panoramic shot of Jerusalem, Israel, site of some of the world's most contested sacred spaces. In the foreground is the iconic Dome of the Rock, sacred to Muslims, which is located on the Temple Mount, site of the destroyed Second Temple and thus also sacred to Jews. (Courtesy of Patricia L. Price.)

shelters the rock (hence the name) from which Muhammad is said to have ascended to heaven. Jews also believe the site to be sacred because it is said to be the place where Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac and is the site of the Western Wall, the remnant of the ancient Jewish temple. Non-Muslims are forbidden from entering the Dome of the Rock for reasons of political conflict and control as well as pollution taboos (which are held by most religions, including Islam). Some Jews voluntarily decline to set foot on the Temple Mount as well, believing it too holy for mere mortal presence.

So much of what we hear and see about this place on our nightly news depicts only the political tensions existing between Israelis and Palestinians. So it is eye-opening to wander the streets of Jerusalem and witness Jews, Christians, and Muslims, orthodox and secular alike, living their daily lives in this city. Yes, there is tension. Mobility and access are often thwarted or at least slowed down, thanks mostly to security concerns. But, as with anyplace else on Earth, most people in Jerusalem are merely going about their business.

I always tell my students that, if given the chance to travel anywhere in the world, they should seriously consider visiting the Middle East. Directly experiencing peoples and places goes a long way toward dispelling the myths and stereotypes about those peoples and places, which are particularly prevalent in this part of the world.

Posted by Patricia Price

appear deliberately humble (see Figure 7.30, bottom left). Similarly, the religious landscape of the Amish and Mennonites in rural North America, the "plain folk," is very subdued because they reject ostentation in any form. Some of their adherents meet in houses or barns, and the churches

that do exist are very modest in appearance, much like those of the southern Calvinists.

Islamic mosques are usually the most imposing structures in the landscape, whereas the visibility of Jewish synagogues varies greatly. Hinduism has produced large

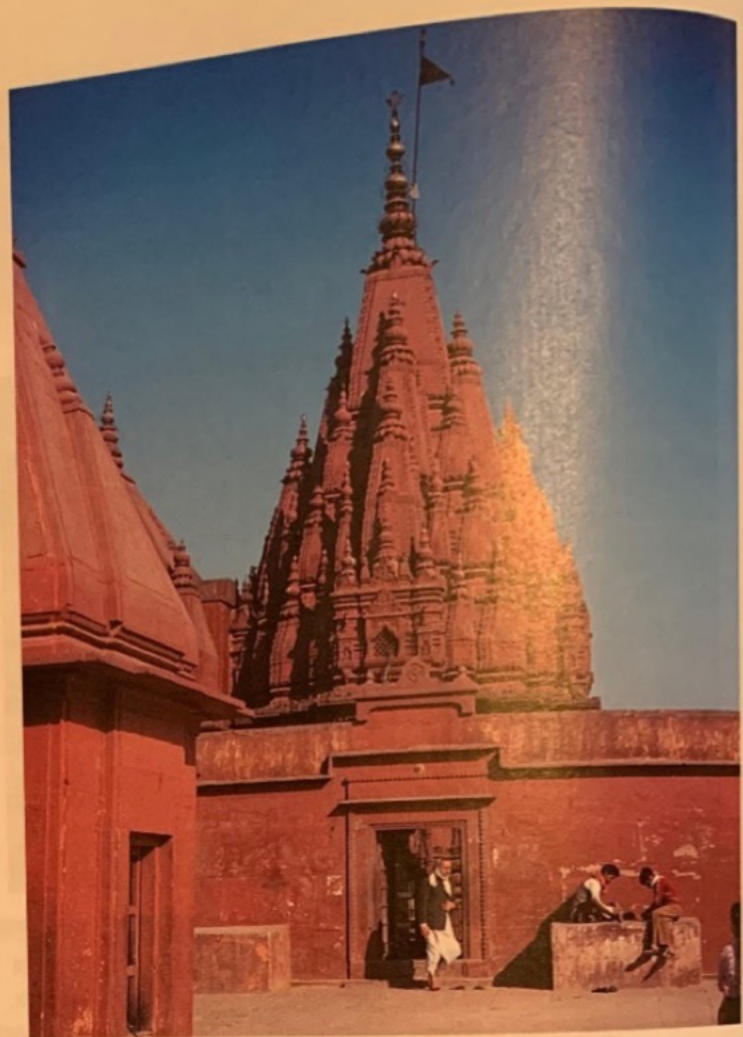
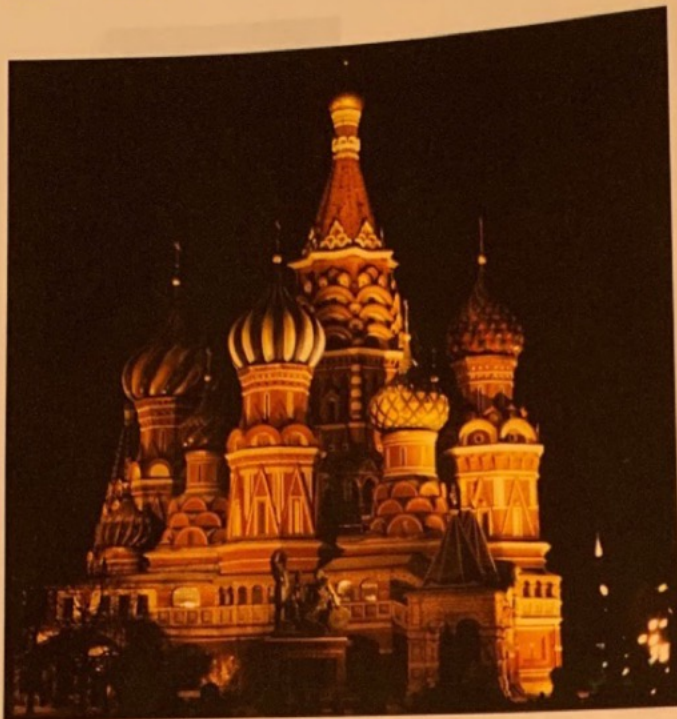


FIGURE 7.30 Traditional religious architecture takes varied forms. St. Basil's Cathedral on Red Square in Moscow (*upper left*) reflects a highly ornate Russian landscape presence, whereas the plain board chapel in the American South (*lower left*) demonstrates the opposite tendency of favoring visual simplicity by British-derived Protestants. The ornate Hindu temple in Varanasi, India (*above*), offers still another sacred landscape. (Source: Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov.)



numbers of visually striking temples for its multiplicity of gods, but much worship is practiced in private households with their own personal shrines (**Figure 7.31**).

Nature religions such as animism generally place only a subtle mark on the landscape. Nature itself is sacred, and imposing features already present in the landscape—mountains, waterfalls, and grottos, for example—mean that few human-made shrines are needed. There are, not surprisingly, exceptions. In Korea, for example, where animism merged with Buddhism and the Chinese composite religion, animistic shrines survive in the landscape (**Figure 7.32**).

Houses of worship can also reveal subtler content and messages. In Polynesian Maori communities of New

Zealand, for example, the *marae*, a structure linked to the pagan gods of the past, generally stands alongside the Christian chapel, which reflects the Maoris' conversion (**Figure 7.33**, page 264). The landscape thus reflects the blending of two faiths.

Paralleling this contrast in church styles are attitudes toward roadside shrines and similar manifestations of faith. Catholic culture regions typically abound with shrines, crucifixes, and other visual reminders of religion, as do some Eastern Orthodox Christian areas. Protestant areas, by contrast, are bare of such symbolism. Their landscapes, instead, display such features as signboards advising the traveler to "get right with God," a common sight in the southern United States (**Figure 7.34**, page 264).



FIGURE 7.31 Temples dedicated to ancestors in Bali, Indonesia. Bali's population practices a blend of Hinduism, animism, and ancestor worship. These temples to ancestors are a feature of every Balinese home, and offerings of incense, food, and flowers are made three times per day to show reverence. (Courtesy of Ari Dorfman.)

Faithful Details

Not only buildings but also other architectural choices, such as color and landscaping elements, can convey spiritual meaning through the landscape. Consider the color green. The image of a Muslim mosque in northern Nigeria in **Figure 7.35** (page 265) depicts how green—sacred in Islam—appears often on mosque domes and minarets, the tall circular towers from which Muslims are called to prayer. The prophet Muhammad declared his favorite

color to be green, and his cloak and turban were said to be green. In Christianity, green also has positive connotations, symbolizing fertility, freedom, hope, and renewal. It is used in decorations, such as banners, and for clergy vestments, especially those associated with the Trinity and with the Epiphany season.

Water, often used as a decorative element in fountains, baths, and pools, has religious meaning. In fact, all three of the great desert monotheisms—Islam, Christianity, and

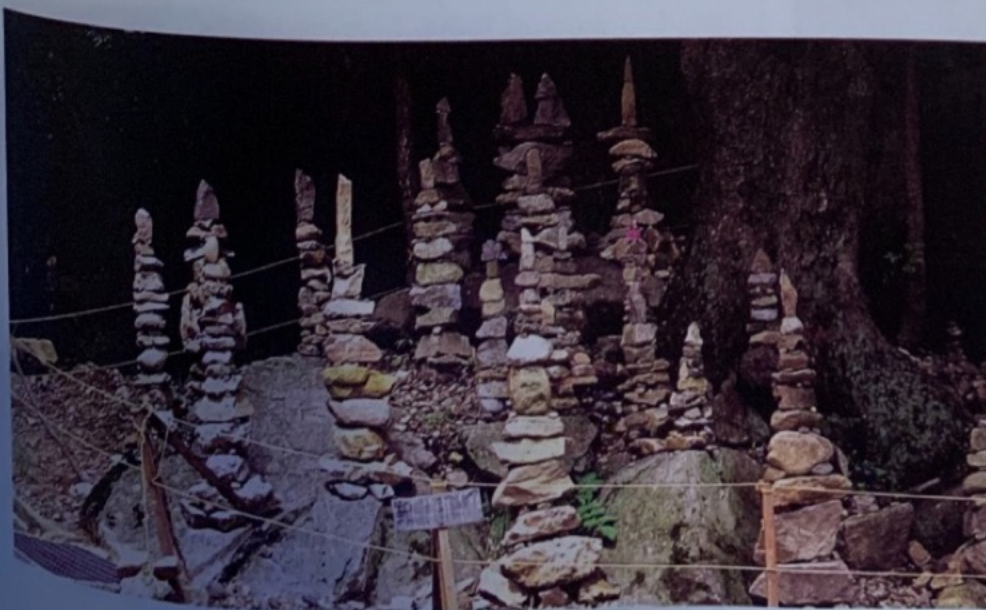


FIGURE 7.32 Stacked stones at a pilgrimage site in South Korea perpetuate an ancient animistic/shamanistic practice. These stones had meaning in ancient times, meaning that has since been lost. (Courtesy of Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov.)



FIGURE 7.33 In the Maori community of Tikitiki, on North Island, New Zealand, a traditional Polynesian marae, or shrine (on the left), stands beside a Christian chapel (on the right). The religious landscape, in this odd juxtaposition, tells us much about the composite faith held by the modern Maori. (Courtesy of Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov.)

Judaism—consider water to have a special status in religious rituals. In general, followers of all three religions believe water has the ability to purify and cleanse the body as well as to purify and cleanse the soul of sins. Muslims use water in ablutions, or washing, of the hands, face, or ears before daily prayers and other rituals. Footbaths, or ablution fountains, are important features located outside of mosques, and decorating with water, particularly pools and fountains, is a common practice in Islamic architecture. Central to Christianity is baptism, where the newborn infant or adult convert is sprinkled with or fully immersed in holy water, symbolizing

the cleansing of original sin for infants and repentance or cleansing from sin for adults. Jews may engage in a ritual bath, known as a *mikveh*, before important events, such as weddings (for women), or on Fridays, the evening of the Jewish Sabbath (for men). The story of the Great Flood, found in the Book of Genesis (common to both Jews and Christians), depicts the washing away of the sins of the world so that it could be born anew.

Landscapes of the Dead

Religions differ greatly in the type of tribute each awards to its dead. These variations appear in the cultural landscape. The few remaining Zoroastrians, called Parsees, who preserve a once-widespread Middle Eastern faith now confined to parts of India, have traditionally left their dead exposed to be devoured by vultures. Thus, the Parsee dead leave no permanent mark on the landscape. Hindus cremate their dead. Having no cemeteries, their dead, as with the Parsees, leave no obvious mark on the land. Yet on the island of Bali in Indonesia, Hinduism has blended with animism such that temples to family ancestors occupy prominent places outside the houses of the Balinese, a landscape feature that does not exist in India itself (see Figure 7.31, page 263).

In Egypt, spectacular pyramids and other tombs were built to house dead leaders. These monuments, as well as the modern graves and tombs of the rural Islamic folk of Egypt, lie on desert land not suitable for farming (Figure 7.36). Muslim cemeteries are usually modest in appearance, but spectacular tombs are sometimes erected for aristocratic persons, giving us such sacred structures as



FIGURE 7.34 Billboard in Three Forks, Montana. Protestant billboards often use American-style advertising slogans to promote church attendance. (Nancy H. Belcher.)

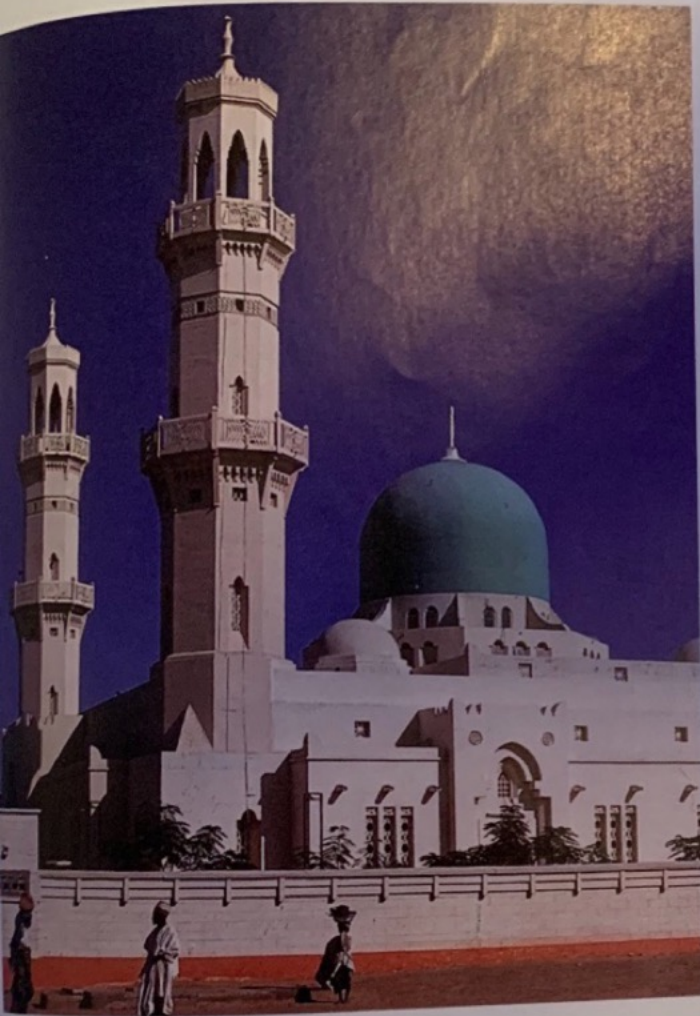


FIGURE 7.35 Muslim mosque in northern Nigeria. Areas with Muslim populations enjoy a landscape where mosque minarets and domes are frequently green in color. (Courtesy of Diane Rawson/Photo Researcher.)

the Taj Mahal in India (**Figure 7.37**, page 266), one of the architectural wonders of the world.

Taoic Chinese typically bury their dead, setting aside land for that purpose and erecting monuments to their deceased kin. In parts of China—reflecting its pre-communist history—cemeteries and ancestral shrines take up as much as 10 percent of the land in some districts, greatly reducing the acreage available for agriculture.

Christians also typically bury their dead in sacred places set aside for that purpose. These sacred places vary significantly from one Christian denomination to another. Some graveyards, particularly those of Mennonites and southern Protestants, are very modest in appearance, reflecting the reluctance of these groups to use any symbolism that might be construed as idolatrous. Among certain other Christian groups, such as Roman Catholics and members of the various Orthodox Churches, cemeteries are places of color and elaborate decoration (**Figure 7.38**, page 266).

Cemeteries often preserve truly ancient cultural traits because people as a rule are reluctant to change their practices relating to the dead. The traditional rural cemetery of the southern United States provides a case in point. Freshwater mussel shells are placed atop many of the elongated grave mounds, and rose bushes and cedars are planted throughout the cemetery. Recent research suggests that the use of roses may derive from the worship of an ancient, pre-Christian mother goddess of the Mediterranean lands. The rose was a symbol of this great goddess, who could restore life to the dead. Similarly, the cedar evergreen is an age-old pagan symbol of death and eternal life, and the use of shell decoration derives from an animistic custom in West Africa, the geographic origin of slaves in the

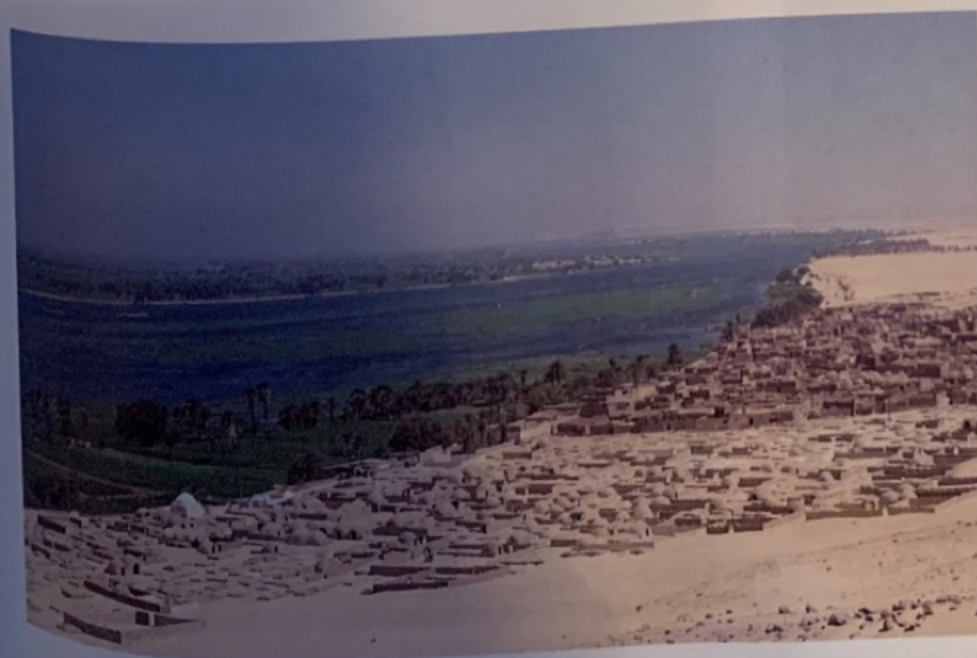


FIGURE 7.36 Landscape of the dead, landscape of the living. The Beni Hassan Islamic necropolis in central Egypt lies in the desert, just beyond the irrigable land; nearby, the living make intensive use of every parcel of land watered by the Nile River. The mud brick structures are all tombs. Thus, the doubly dead landscape is sacred, whereas the realm of living plants and people is profane. (Courtesy of Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov.)



FIGURE 7.37 The Taj Mahal in Agra, India. Built as a Muslim tomb, the Taj Mahal is perhaps the most impressive religious structure in the world. (Pallava Bagla/Corbis.)

American South. Although the present Christian population of the South is unaware of the origins of their cemetery symbolism, it seems likely that their landscape of the dead contains animistic elements thousands of years old, revealing truly ancient beliefs and cultural diffusions.

Reflecting on Geography

What is the most visible element of the religious landscape where you live?

Sacred Space

Sacred spaces consist of natural and/or human-made sites that possess special religious meaning that is recognized as worthy of devotion, loyalty, fear, or esteem. By virtue of their sacredness, these special places might be avoided by the faithful, sought out by pilgrims, or barred to members of other religions (see Figure 7.18, page 250). Often, sacred

sacred spaces

Areas recognized by a religious group as worthy of devotion, loyalty, esteem, or fear to the extent that they become sought out, avoided, inaccessible to nonbelievers, and/or removed from economic use.

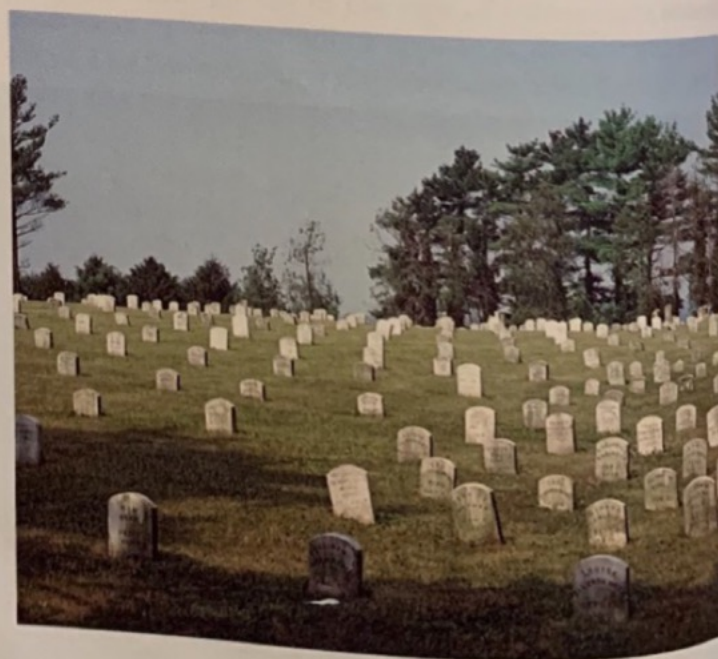


FIGURE 7.38 Two different Christian landscapes of the dead. In the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico, the dead rest in colorful, aboveground crypts, whereas in Amana, Iowa, communalistic Germans prefer tidiness, order, and equality. (Left: Macduff Everton/Corbis; Right: Courtesy of Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov.)

space includes the site of supposed supernatural events or is viewed as the abode of gods. Cemeteries, too, are also generally regarded as a type of sacred space. So is Mount Sinai, described by geographer Joseph Hobbs as endowed "with special grace," where God instructed the Hebrews to "mark out the limits of the mountain and declare it sacred." Conflict can result if two religions venerate the same space. In Jerusalem, for example, the Muslim Dome of the Rock, on the site where Muhammad is believed to have ascended to heaven, stands above the Western Wall, the remnant of the ancient Jewish temple (Figure 7.39; see Patricia's Notebook on page 261). These two religions literally claim the same space as their holy site, which has led to conflict.

Sacred space is receiving increased attention in the world. In the mid-1990s, the internationally funded Sacred

Land Project began to identify and protect such sites, 5000 of which have been cataloged in the United Kingdom alone. Included are such places as ancient stone circles, pilgrim routes, holy springs, and sites that convey mystery or great natural beauty. This last type falls into the category of mystical places: locations unconnected with established religion where, for whatever reason, some people believe that extraordinary, supernatural things can happen. The Bermuda Triangle in the western Atlantic, where airplanes and ships supposedly disappear, is a mystical place and, in effect, a vernacular culture region. Some people find the expanses of the American Great Plains mystical, and writer Jonathan Raban spoke of them as "a landscape ideally suited to the staging of the millennium, open to the gaze of the Almighty." Sometimes the sacred space of vanished ancient religions never loses—or

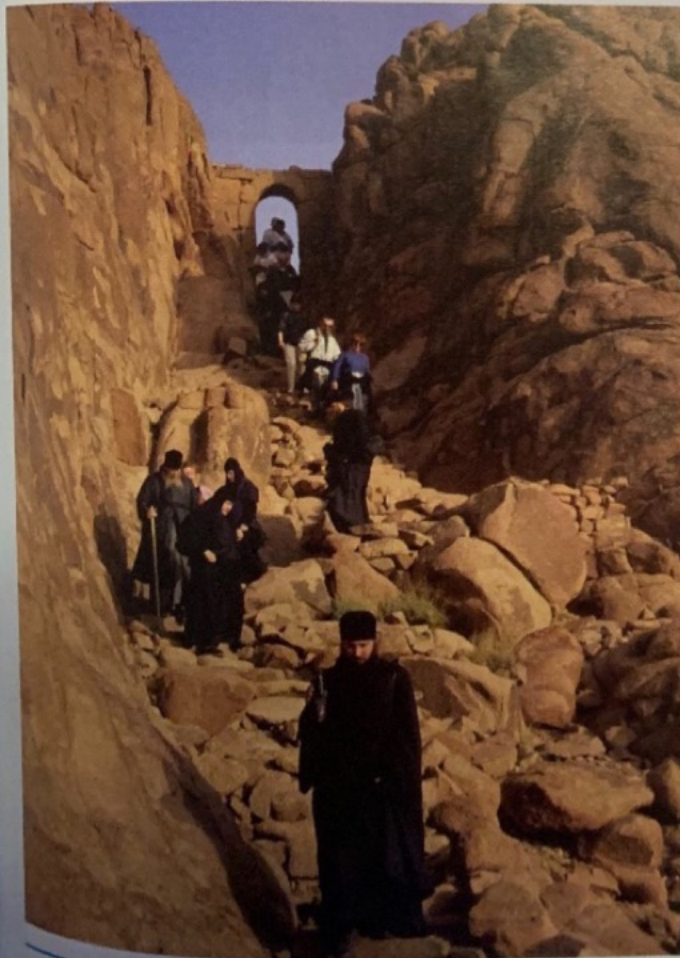


FIGURE 7.39 Sacred spaces. The three so-called Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—arose in the same place and thus their adherents revere some of the same holy sites. *Left:* Mount Sinai, in North Africa, is where Moses is said to have received the Ten Commandments as the Israelites continued their journey out of Egypt and is also mentioned several times in the Qur'an. *Right:* Jews pray at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, in Israel. Standing above the wall, on the site of the destroyed Jewish temple, is one of the holiest sites for Muslims: the golden-capped mosque called the Dome of the Rock. (See also the photograph in Patricia's Notebook, page 261.) (Left: Konrad Wothe/age fotostock; Right: Gary Cralle/Gettyone.)



FIGURE 7.40 Our Lady of Clearwater. This 60-foot (18-meter) image appeared in December 1996 in the window of a bank building in Clearwater, Florida. Because of its resemblance to Our Lady of Guadalupe, Catholics—including a sizable Mexican immigrant population as well as Catholic pilgrims from around the region—gather in the parking lot every day for the celebration of Mass. (Courtesy of Patricia L. Price.)

later regains—the functional status of mystical place, which is what has happened at Stonehenge in England.

In his 1957 book *The Sacred and the Profane*, the renowned religious historian Mircea Eliade suggested that all societies, past and present, have sacred spaces. According to Eliade, sacred spaces are so important because they establish a geographic center on which society can be anchored. Through what he termed *hierophany*, a sacred space emerges from the profane, ordinary spaces surrounding it. A contemporary example of hierophany is provided by the appearance of an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe on a bank building in Clearwater, Florida, transforming the profane space of finance into a Catholic pilgrimage site (Figure 7.40). For more information on another type of sacred space—sites originally marked by tragedy and violence—see Practicing Geography.)

PRACTICING GEOGRAPHY

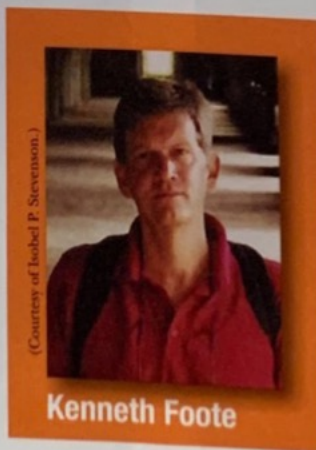
Kenneth Foote came to geography the way many people do: he simply found it more interesting than anything else he'd studied before. He began college knowing he was interested in cities and thought he would become an architect or an urban planner. However, at the University of Wisconsin, where he went to school, most of the classes on cities were offered by the Geography Department. As Professor Foote says, "I soon found geography—particularly landscape studies and cultural and historical geography—more interesting than urban planning."

Professor Foote has focused on places and what happens to them in the aftermath of violent or tragic events. He has studied the sites of the Oklahoma City bombing and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York City, among others. "For me the question is why some of these places are transformed into powerful and evocative monuments whereas others disappear, or are actually effaced, from view entirely." His book *Shadowed Ground* (see Doing Geography) focuses on the United States, while his recent work concentrates on Europe. "Once I began to focus on the transformative effect of violence on people and place," he writes, "I realized there were many ways I could extend my work. For me, a good research question almost always suggests another and another and another." His current research examines the very different ways in which European countries have

interpreted places associated with World Wars I and II; the Holocaust; civil wars; and events of social, political, and economic violence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. During the past few years, he has become very interested in how national shrines and memorials are created, managed, and sometimes manipulated by certain groups. "I am becoming more and more interested in the way that the legacies of the cold war will be remembered and commemorated throughout Europe."

Detailed case studies of places and events form the building blocks of Professor Foote's research. He uses photographs and maps to document what has happened at a place. He supplements this visual evidence by interviewing people about what happened as well as by searching through newspapers and other documents to see what the written record says happened. Fieldwork—actually going to the place in question and consulting human, visual, and written sources in those places—is usually at the heart of how cultural geographers do their work, and Professor

Foote is no exception. Because he enjoys traveling, meeting new people, and visiting libraries and archives, Professor Foote enjoys research more than any other part of his job. "I love to be on the road investigating interesting places, talking with people, or trying to locate good sources of local history. I try to be on the road at least one month a year, sometimes more.



Kenneth Foote

CONCLUSION

Religion is firmly interwoven in the fabric of culture, a bright hue in the human mosaic; religions vary greatly from one region to another, creating diversity so profound as to give special significance to James Griffith's admonition that we should all "learn, respect, and walk softly." Yet religions tend to share some common elements, the most basic being that they provide a structure of faith that anchors communities. This religious spatial variation leads us to ask how these distributions came to be, a question best answered by examining methods of cultural diffusion. Some religions actively encourage their own diffusion through missionary activity or conquest. Other religions erect barriers to expansion diffusion by restricting membership to one particular ethnic group. People, as well, are set in motion thanks to spiritual practices, most notably pilgrimages.

In today's globalizing world, it is worth exploring how—or even if—the world's great religions will become significantly modified in response to changing contexts. The common practice of Internet-based religious practice brings into focus the debates over the role of place in a global world.

The theme of nature-culture reveals some fundamental ties between religion and the physical environment. One major function of many religious systems, particularly the animistic faiths, is to appease and placate the forces of nature in order to achieve and maintain harmony between humans and the physical environment. Plants and animals spread—or not—with the spread of religions. The followers of various religions differ in their outlooks on environmental modification by humans.

The cultural landscape abounds with expressions of religious belief. Places of worship—mosques, temples, churches, and shrines—differ in appearance, distinctiveness, prominence, and frequency of occurrence from one religious culture region to another. These buildings provide a visual index to the various faiths, as do their related architectural elements. Cemeteries and sacred spaces also add a special effect to the landscape that tells us about the religious character of the population. In all these ways, and more, the five themes of cultural geography prove relevant to the study of the world's religions.

DOING GEOGRAPHY

The Making of Sacred Spaces

For this exercise, you will use Professor Foote's ideas about how spaces become sacred. In his book *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes*

of *Violence and Tragedy*, Professor Foote argues that what a society chooses to forget about its past is at least as important as what it remembers in shaping an image of itself that it can present to the world. Professor Foote discusses how certain places in the United States have, or have not, become sacred sites. He notes, for example, that the battlefields of the Revolutionary and Civil wars are well marked and visited by thousands every year. Yet the 1692 execution site of the supposed witches of Salem, Massachusetts, is unmarked. How could the exact site of such an infamous event in U.S. history be impossible to locate? Professor Foote realized that this was not limited to the United States, writing, "Indeed, soon after my first trip to Salem, I found myself in Berlin before the reunification of Germany. There I came across similar places—Nazi sites such as the Gestapo headquarters and Reich chancellery—that have lain vacant since just after World War II and seem to be scarred permanently by shame."

Professor Foote suggests that sites of important events can be sanctified, obliterated, purposely ignored, or fall somewhere in between. Sanctified sites are set apart from other sites, are carefully maintained, are often publicly owned, and attract annual visitors and ceremonies. At the other end of the spectrum, the sites of particularly shameful, stigmatized, or violent events simply may be obliterated from the landscape in an attempt to forget about them.

Steps to Understanding Sacred Spaces

Step 1: Think about sites near where you now live and where a violent or tragic event occurred, for example, a murder, a freak accident, a natural disaster, an assassination, an act of terrorism, or a heinous crime. Virtually all places experience some such event. If nothing readily comes to mind, inquire, and inevitably you will discover something for this exercise, even if you live in a rural area or a college town.

Step 2: Once you have identified a site, consider its current status. Is it sanctified, is it obliterated, or does it fall somewhere in between? Elements of the landscape, such as signs or monuments (or their lack) will indicate that status of the site.

Step 3: Take note of any debates that have occurred about what to do with this site. Has the status of the site changed over time? How?

When people are unsure of how an event fits into their history, the site where the event occurred may inhabit a sort of limbo, remaining unmarked until the society in question comes to terms with the event. This is the case with many sites of racially motivated, violent, or shameful acts in the United States, such as the Memphis, Tennessee, motel where Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in 1968 or the Manzanar, California, internment camp where Japanese-Americans were confined during World War II. Only recently have both sites become prominent on the landscape after decades of neglect. Consider the following questions:

- Are there any newsworthy events happening now that may mark a place as a site of tragedy?
- What sites, whether close by to you or far away, do you expect to become more sacred over time?
- Can you think of an event that is so horrific that the place where it occurred will be forever forgotten and erased from the map?



Cemetery at Manzanar National Historic Site. The Japanese inscription reads "Soul Consoling Tower." Fifteen of the 146 Japanese-Americans who died at this Relocation Center are buried here. A total of 110,000 Japanese-Americans were interned during World War II in camps like Manzanar. After the 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Japanese-Americans were deemed "enemy aliens." It was not until 1992—nearly 50 years after the end of the war—that Manzanar was declared a National Historic Site. (George Ostertag/age fotostock.)

Key Terms

adaptive strategy	p. 255
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culture hearth	p. 246
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fundamentalism	p. 234
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Geography of Religion on the Internet

You can learn more about the geography of religion on the Internet at the following web sites:

Get Religion

<http://www.getreligion.org/>

Founded because (quoting journalist William Schneider) "the press . . . just doesn't get religion," this blog attempts to ferret out the ghosts lurking in news coverage of religion.

History of Religion

<http://www.mapsofwar.com/ind/history-of-religion.html>

"See 5000 years of religion in 90 seconds" by launching this dynamic map. The timeline shows major developments in the history of world religions.

Our Lady of Guadalupe

<http://www.sancta.org/opro1.html>

On the "ora pro nobis" ("pray for us") section of this web site, you can post your prayer or request to the Virgin of Guadalupe and read the heartfelt posts of other devotees.

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

<http://pewforum.org>

Seeking to promote a greater understanding of the intersection between religion and public affairs, the Pew Forum conducts polls, surveys, and demographic analysis in the United States and around the world.

World Council of Churches

<http://www.oikoumene.org/>

An interdenominational group headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, the World Council of Churches works for greater cooperation and understanding among different faiths.

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SEEING GEOGRAPHY Parking Lot Shrine

How can an ordinary landscape, such as a parking lot, become a sacred space?



Parking lot shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe, Self-Help Graphics and Art, East Los Angeles.

This large statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe inhabits the corner of the parking lot of Self-Help Graphics and Art, an artists' cooperative in East Los Angeles. According to Michael Amezcua, a metalwork artist at Self-Help, neighborhood residents actively use this shrine, leaving offerings and petitions to the Virgin in this outdoor grotto. Every December 12, neighborhood residents gather here to celebrate the feast day of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

We could interpret this unique parking lot shrine to be a variation on the yard shrine, a common feature of the residential landscape of the southwestern United States. Throughout the Mexican-American homeland region of the Southwest, it is common to see a small shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe in people's front yards. This, in turn, is a variation on the Mexican custom of maintaining elaborate shrines and altars to important

religious figures. These are sometimes located inside the house in a space reserved especially for altars (called a *nicho*). Or they can be located outside the house, near the front door, because Mexican homes usually do not have yard space in front of the house. On December 12, altars all over Mexico and Mexican-American areas in the United States are elaborately decorated with candles, ribbons, and flowers. Devotees of the Virgin of Guadalupe celebrate with family and neighbors throughout the night. Since turquoise blue is considered to be the favorite color of the Virgin of Guadalupe, this color abounds. Because the Virgin of Guadalupe is also the official patron saint of Mexico, the red, white, and green of the Mexican

flag is also prevalent in altar decorations.

In Miami, another Latino population center in the United States, yard shrines are built to La Virgen de la Caridad de Cobre. Like the Virgin of Guadalupe, La Virgen de la Caridad is an American manifestation of the Virgin Mary. This Virgin hails from the copper mining village of Cobre, in Cuba. She is thought to protect seafarers and has been adopted by Cuban rafters as their patron saint. Yemayá, who is an *orisha*, or spirit, in the Afrocentric Cuban religious tradition of Santería, is often equated with La Virgen de la Caridad de Cobre, as both are associated with the sea.

What does the fact that this particular shrine is built in a parking lot rather than a yard say about what, and how, spaces become sacred? Can you think of a more mundane place than a parking lot for such a hallowed figure as the Virgin of Guadalupe? Perhaps the drive-through architecture of strip malls, highways, and parking lots that is so closely associated with the urban landscape of Los Angeles has something to do with it. Where else, other than in Los Angeles, can you find a sacred parking lot?