**Chapter 6: Religions**

**Key Issue 1: Where Are the World’s Religions Distributed?**

Religion is a way for a group of people to build cultural identity, much like language. Migration is the primary action through which religion is spread, although it is qualitatively different compared to the diffusion of language through migration. While many migrants learn the language of their new home or destination, they typically retain their religious beliefs. It is also possible for people to speak multiple languages, while most religions require exclusive adherence.

**Introducing Religions** An exact census on the count of religious membership is not taken in many major countries – for instance, the government of the United States does not ask its citizens which religion they practice. This relatively vague idea of how many people practice a certain religion can invite controversy to many layers of debate regarding religion – for example, adherents may feel that the number of adherents to their religion has been underestimated and therefore accorded less prominence than deserved in world and regional data.

The international statistics used in this chapter are collected by *Adherents.com*, the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, the Pew Research Center, and World Religion Database – all organizations unaffiliated with a particular religion. These measure also rely on self-identification. The world’s religions can be categorized as follows:

* Four largest religions. 77 percent of the world’s population follow one of four religions: Christianity (2.2 billion people), Islam (1.6 billion people), Hinduism (1 billion people), and Buddhism (500 million people).
* Folk religions. 6 percent of the world’s population adhere to “folk religions,” although this count is hard to estimate. Chinese traditional, primal-indigenous, and African traditional religions are all prominent folk religions.
* Other religions. 1 percent of the world’s population practice a number of other religions. In this group, Juche, Judaism, Sikhism, and Spiritism are the four claiming the most adherents, counting between 14 and 23 million in their ranks. Bahá’í, Cao Dai, Jainism, Shinto, Tenrikyo, and Zoroastrianism are religions with between 1 and 10 million adherents.
* The remaining 16 percent of the world’s population consider themselves unaffiliated with any religion. Some folks in this group espouse **atheism**, which is belief that God does not exist, or **agnosticism**, which is belief that the existence of God can’t be empirically proven.

**Classifying Religions** A **universalizing religion** appeals to people in a broad range of locations. The three universalizing religions with the largest number of adherents are Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. **Ethnic religions** tend to be most appealing to a particular group of people in a particular place. The largest ethnic religion by far is Hinduism, with folk religions also being classified as ethnic. These two categories differ in their origin, diffusion, and distribution patterns.

**Global Distribution of Religions** In most countries, the religion with the largest share of adherents is either Islam or Christianity. Christianity is the most widely practiced religion in the Western Hemisphere and in most countries of Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. In Southwest Asia, Central Asia, and North Africa, Islam is predominantly practiced. Buddhism and Hinduism is also widely practiced in Asian countries. China, the most populous country in the world, is home to the most unaffiliated people. Judaism is most heavily concentrated in Israel.

**Regional Diversity of Religions** The four regions with relatively more religious diversity are East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa.

* In East Asia, more than one-half of the people are unaffiliated with any religion. Most of the other one-half are divided about equally between Buddhism and folk religions.
* In South Asia, approximately two-thirds of the population practices Hinduism, while the remaining one-third adheres to Islam. At the national scale, divisions are more stark: India is 80 percent Hindu, while more than 90 percent of people in Bangladesh and Pakistan adhere to Islam.
* In Southeast Asia, divisions are relatively more equally-split: 40 percent are Muslims, 23 percent Buddhists, and 21 percent Christians. 87 percent of Indonesia is Muslim, while more than 90 percent of Cambodians and Thai are Buddhist. The Philippines are more than 90 percent Christian.
* In sub-Saharan Africa, two-thirds of the people are Christian, while one-third are Muslim.

**Distribution of Christians** Universalizing religions can be divided into branches, denominations,and congregations.A **congregation** is a local assembly of people brought together for common religious worship. A **denomination** is a division of a branch that unites a number of local congregations into a single legal and administrative body. A **branch** is a large, fundamental division within a religion.

**Distribution of Branches of Christianity** Christianity has three major branches: Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox – however, these three major branches do not encompass all people who adhere to Christianity. Roman Catholics make up 50 percent of the world’s Christians, while Orthodox comprise 12 percent. The remaining 38 percent are split between Protestant and others, although sources cannot come to a consensus on the magnitude of each.

**Distribution of Branches in Europe** In Europe, 47 percent of Christians are Roman
Catholics, 18 percent are Protestants, and 35 percent are Orthodox. Roman Catholicism is extensively practiced in Southwestern and Eastern Europe, while Protestantism and Orthodoxy are practiced widely in Northwestern and Eastern/Southeastern Europe, respectively. Stark geographic divisions can be seen by examining the distribution of branches of Christianity within individual countries, as well – in Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, Protestantism is predominant in the northern regions of these countries, while Roman Catholicism is concentrated in southern reaches.

**Distribution of Branches in the Western Hemisphere** Christianity is the most widely practiced religion in the Western Hemisphere by a large margin. 86 percent of the population of the Western Hemisphere adheres to Christianity. A distinct difference in the distribution between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism can be seen in Latin America and North America. In Latin America, 81 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, while 18 percent of Christians are Protestant in the region.
In North America, 63 percent of Christians are Protestant, while 32 percent are Roman Catholic. The United States displays a diverse collection of Christian faiths – Roman Catholics make up 29 percent of the population, Evangelical Protestants 26 percent, Mainline Protestants 18 percent, historically black churches 7 percent, other Christians 3 percent, and other faiths 5 percent. Additionally, 2 percent of the U.S. population belongs to the Church of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism), concentrated mostly in
Utah and neighboring states.

**Distribution of Muslims and Buddhists** In Central Asia, Southwest Asia, and North Africa, Islam is the predominant religion. Buddhism is clustered primarily in East Asia and Southeast Asia.

**Distribution of Muslims** The word *Islam* in Arabic means “submission to the will of God,” and it has a similar root to the Arabic word for “peace.” One who practices Islam is known as a *Muslim*, which in Arabic means “one who surrenders to God.” While countries in Central Asia, Southwest Asia, and
North Africa are home to majority Muslim populations, there are actually greater numbers of Muslims in South and Southeast Asia (as can be seen in countries like Indonesia, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh).

**Islam’s Branches** Islam is divided into two main branches: Sunni and Shiite (sometimes spelled *Shia*). 88 percent of Muslims adhere to the Sunni branch, and are the majority branch in most Muslim countries in Southwest Asia and North Africa, as well as in Southeast Asia. There are various schools of thought in Sunni Islam with corresponding geographic distributions – Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, and Shafi’i school are among the most widespread, named after their founders. Shiites are the largest branch in Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen. The Ithna Ashari, Ismaili, and Zaidi schools of thought are major sects of Shiite Islam.

**Islam in Europe and North America** In recent years, North American and European Muslim populations have rapidly increased. In Europe, 5 percent of the population are Muslim. The colonial history of France in North Africa has led it to be home to the largest Muslim population in Europe, with about 4 million adherents. Immigration has contributed a great deal to Germany’s Muslim population, numbering approximately 3 million (mostly from Turkey). The Southeastern European countries of Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Serbia each are home to about 2 million Muslims. Between
1 and 5 million Muslims currently reside in North America, a dramatic rise from just a few hundred thousand that were living there in 1990.

**Distribution of Buddhists** Buddhism, the world’s third largest universalizing religion, is clustered primarily in East Asia and Southeast Asia. Three main branches comprise greater Buddhism: Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayana. Mayahanists make up approximately 56 percent of Buddhists, primarily in China, Japan, and Korea. 38 percent of Buddhists are Theravadists, being primarily concentrated in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Vajrayanists (also known as Lamaists and Tantrayanists) comprise 6 percent of Buddhists, with adherents located primarily in Tibet and Mongolia. It is difficult to estimate the number of Buddhists, as only a few people (such as Monks) participate Buddhist institutions. Buddhism is also not an exclusive religion, in that people can adhere to both Buddhism and another religion. This is in contrast to Christianity or Islam, which require exclusive adherence.

**Distribution of Ethnic Religions** The distributions of ethnic religions are generally more clustered than those of universalizing religions. While universalizing religions may diffuse from one culture to another, the adherents of ethnic religions have remained embedded in the culture where they first emerged.

**Distribution of Hindus** Hinduism, the world’s third-largest religion, is the ethnic religion with the largest number of followers by a large margin, with 1 billion adherents. Compared to the world’s universalizing religions, adherents to Hinduism are geographically clustered in one country – India (with 97 percent residing there). 2 percent of Hindus live in Nepal, while 1 percent are in Bangladesh, and small numbers scattered elsewhere. Hinduism allows for adherents to worship a god or concept from a wide spectrum of possibilities. Despite this diversity of choice, 80 percent of Hindus worship Vishnu
(known as Vaishnavism), a loving god. The second largest contingent of Hindus worship Shiva, a protective and destructive god.

**Chinese Traditional Ethnic Religions** Religions based in East Asia are illustrative of the difficulty of categorizing ethnic religions and calculating the number of adherents. Chinese traditional religions are **syncretic**, meaning they combine several traditions. In China, these syncretic religions combine Buddhism with Confucianism, Taoism, and other traditional Chinese practices.

**Confucianism** Confucius was a philosopher and teacher from the Chinese province of Lu. His teachings emphasize the importance of the Chinese tradition of *li*, which can be translated roughly as “propriety” or “correct behavior.”

**Taoism** Originating with the government administrator Lao-Zi (also spelled Lao Tzu), Taoism prioritized the mystical and magical aspects of life over the importance of public life, which is emblematic of Confucianism. *Tao*, which means “the way” or “the path,” cannot be comprehended by reason and knowledge because not everything is knowable.

**Primal-Indigenous Ethnic Religions** Several hundred million people practice what *Adherents.com* has classified primal-indigenous religions. People who practice these religions primarily live in Southeast Asia or on South Pacific islands, particularly in Vietnam and Laos. Practitioners of primal-indigenous religions believe that God is present in all things, and that nature is spiritual. Shamanism and Paganism are included in these religions. Shamans believe that invisible forces or spirits affect the lives of the living. Paganism encompasses many different beliefs, although it is mostly associated with the practices of ancient people, such as the Greeks and Romans.

**African Traditional Folk Religions** Roughly 27 million Africans are estimated by Pew Research Center to follow folk religions, sometimes called **animism**. Animists believe that inanimate objects such as plants and stones, or natural events such as thunderstorms and earthquakes, are “animated,” or imbued with discrete spirits and conscious life. In present day Africa, 51 percent of the continent’s population is Christian, while 43 percent is Muslim. In the past, folk religionists made up a much larger share of the population; in 1900, 70 percent of the continent’s population adhered to these beliefs, while as recently as 1980 one-half was still classified as practicing folk religions. Remaining folk religionists are situated in a belt that separates predominantly Muslim North Africa and predominantly Christian sub-Saharan Africa.

**Distribution of Other Religions** In the following sections, 10 religions are outlined in order of the estimated number of adherents. Most of these religions are clustered in one or two countries, with the exception of Bahá’í.

**Religions with 14 to 25 Million Adherents** Four religions have an estimated 14 to 25 million adherents: Sikhism, Juche, Spiritism, and Judaism.

**Sikhism** All but 3 million of the 23 million Sikhs around the world are clustered in the Punjab region of India. Guru Nanak (1469-1538) founded Sikhism near present-day Lahore, Pakistan. God was revealed to Nanak as The One Supreme Being, or Creator, who rules the universe by divine will. The followers of Guru Nanak became known as Sikhs, Hindu for “disciples.” The Guru Granth Sa-hib (the Holy Granth of Enlightenment), compiled and edited by Guru Arjan in 1604, is the Sikh holy book.

**Juche** Most North Koreans are categorized by Adherents.com as following Juche, which is Korean for “self-reliance.” Juche was organized by Kim Il-sung, the leader of North Korea between 1948 and 1994. Some sources classify Juche as a government ideology rather than a religion.

**Spiritism** Spiritism is the belief that the human personality continues to exist after death and can communicate with the living through the agency of a medium or psychic. Most spiritists are clustered in Brazil.

**Judaism** About 40 percent of the world’s 14 million Jews reside in the United States and another
40 percent in Israel. The name Judaism derives from Judah, one of the patriarch Jacob’s 12 sons
(Israel is another biblical name for Jacob). The Tanakh tells the ancient history of the Jewish people and the laws of the Jewish faith. Judaism is the first recorded religion to espouse monotheism, belief that there is only one God. Judaism offered a sharp contrast to polytheism, or the belief in more than one god. Christianity and Islam find some of their roots in Judaism.

**Religions** **with 1 to 10 Million Adherents** Six religions have an estimated 1 to 10 million adherents: Bahá’í, Tenrikyo, Jainism, Shinto, Cao Dai, and Zoroastrianism.

**Bahá’í** Bahá’í is a universalizing religion, distributed between India, other Asian countries, Africa, and the Western Hemisphere. Bahá’í was established in Shíráz, Iran, in 1844. It developed from the Bábi faith, under the leadership of Siyyid ‘Ali Muhammad, known as the Báb. Shiite Muslims reacted violently to the birth of the Bahá’í faith, executing the Báb and 20,000 of his followers in the mid-nineteenth century. Husayn ‘Ali Nuri, one of the Báb’s disciples, became known as Bahá’u’lláh and recognized by followers of Bahá’í as the prophet and messenger of God. Bahá’u’lláh believed that he was sent by God to overcome the disunity of religions and establish a universal faith through abolition of racial, class, and religious prejudices.

**Tenrikyo** Formerly viewed as a branch of Shinto, Tenrikyo was organized as a separate religion in 1854 by a woman named Nakayama Miki (1798-1887). Adherents of Tenrikyo believe that God expressed the divine will through Nakayama’s role as the Shrine of God. Adherents.com estimates that there are
2 million adherents of Tenrikyo worldwide, with 95 percent clustered in Japan.

**Jainism** Jainism emerged in South Asia approximately 2,500 years ago. With the rise of Buddhism and Hinduism in the region, Jainism faced a decline in importance, especially since Jains believe that nonviolence and self-control are the means to achieve liberation. 4 million Jains, comprising 95 percent of the total Jain population, reside in India. Jains are also distributed in the United States, with 25 of the 50 states accommodating Jain centers.

**Shinto** The cultural history of Japan is firmly grounded in the country’s ethnic religion, Shinto. The Japanese government report that the country is home to roughly 100 million Shintos, or nearly
four-fifths of Japan’s population. Despite this figure, only 4 million Japanese identify themselves as Shinto in response to opinion polls. Some Japanese people view Shinto as a cultural feature rather than a religion.

**Cao Dai** Cao Dai originated in Vietnam in the 1920s. The name is attributed to adherent’s belief in God as the Supreme Being, Creator, and Ultimate Reality of the Universe. Cao Dai existed in opposition to the French colonial administration and Communists that came to rule the country throughout the twentieth century. With the recognition of Cao Dai by the Vietnamese government in 1997, the number of adherents grew to an estimated 4 million, with the vast majority living in Vietnam.

**Zoroastrianism** Zoroastrianism was founded around 3,500 years ago by the Prophet Zoroaster
(or Zarathustra). Zoroastrianism was more formally organized around 1,500 years ago in the Persian Empire and was the state religion for several ancient empires in Central Asia. The number of adherents decreased in response to the rise of Islam in the region. There are between 2 and 3 million Zoroastrians worldwide, with concentrations in India, Iran, and the United States. It is hard to estimate their numbers as Zoroastrians are said to be reserved in identifying themselves.

**Key Issue 2: Why Do Religions Have Distinctive Distributions?**

**Origin of Christianity and Islam in Southwest Asia** Both Christianity and Islam originated in Southwest Asia. It is characteristic of universalizing religions, such as Christianity and Islam, that their places of origin are known and rooted in the events in the life of a man.

**Origin of Christianity** Christianity was founded upon the teachings of Jesus, who was born between
8 and 4 b.c. in Bethlehem and died crucified in Jerusalem about a.d. 30. Raised a Jew, Jesus preached the coming of the Kingdom of God. The four Gospels of the Christian Bible (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) document miraculous deed that the writers attributed to Jesus. He was referred to as *Christ*, from the Greek word for the Hebrew word Messiah, which means “anointed.” After being betrayed by his follower Judas Iscariot in the third year of his mission, he was executed as an agitator. On the third day after his death, his tomb was found empty – Christians believe that Jesus died to atone for human sins, that he was raised from the dead by God, and his Resurrection from the dead provides people hope for salvation.

**Roman Catholic Branch** Roman Catholics accept the teachings of the Bible, as well as the interpretation of those teachings by the Church hierarchy, led by the Pope. The Pope is viewed by Roman Catholics as possessing a universal primacy or authority, and they believe the Church is infallible in resolving theological disputes. The seven sacraments of Baptism, the Eucharist, Penance, Confirmation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Anointing the Sick are seen by Roman Catholics as God conveying His grace directly to humanity.

**Orthodox Branch** Orthodoxy encompasses the faith and practices of a collection of churches that emerged in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. In the fifth century, the Roman and Eastern churches split due to a growing rivalry between the Pope and the Patriarchy of Constantinople. In 1054,
Pope Leo IX condemned the Patriarchy of Constantinople, finalizing the split between Rome and Constantinople’s churches. Orthodoxy accepts the seven sacraments but rejects Roman doctrines adopted since the eighth century.

**Protestant Branch** Protestantism originated with the principles of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. The Reformation movement is viewed as beginning when Martin Luther nailed 95 theses on the door of the church at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. According to Luther, Christians have primary responsibility for achieving personal salvation through direct communication with God. Grace is achieved through faith rather than through sacraments performed by the Church.

**Origin of Islam** The foundation of Islamic belief involves performing five acts, known as five pillars of faith:

1. *Shahadah*, which means that Muslims frequently recite their belief that there is no deity worthy of worship except the one God, the source of all creation, as well as their belief that Muhammad is the messenger of God.
2. *Salat*, which means that five times daily, a Muslim prays, facing the city of Makkah (Mecca), as a direct link to God.
3. *Zakat*, which means that a Muslim gives generously to charity as an act of purification and growth.
4. *Sawm of Ramadan*, which means that a Muslim fasts during the month of Ramadan as an act of
self-purification.
5. *Hajj*, which means that if physically and financially able, a Muslim makes a pilgrimage to Makkah.

Islam, Christianity, and Judaism all consider humanity originating with Adam and Abraham to
have been one of his descendants. Jews and Christians trace their story through Abraham’s first wife, Sarah, and her son Isaac. Muslims trace their story through his second wife, Hagar, and her son Ishmael. Muslims believe Abraham took his wife Hagar and son Ishmael to Makkah. Hundreds of years later, according to Islamic belief, one of Ishmael’s descendants, Muhammad, became the Prophet of Islam.

**Prophet Muhammad** In a.d. 570, Muhammad was born in Makkah. Muslims believe that at age 40, during a meditative retreat, Muhammad received his first revelation from God through the Angel Gabriel. Gabriel revealed God’s words to Muhammad, which was collected as Islam’s holy book, the Quran. Muhammad and his followers faced persecution, and in 622 he was commanded by God to emigrate to the city of Yathrib (present-day Madinah), in an event known as the Hijra (marking the beginning of the Muslim calendar). He returned to Makkah several years later and established Islam as the city’s religion.

**Shiite and Sunni Branches** The two largest branches of Islam, Sunni and Shiite, harken back to the earliest days of the religion and reflect the disagreement over the line of succession in Islamic leadership. As Muhammad had no son, his father-in-law, Abu Bakr, became caliph (“successor of the prophet”). Following Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman were caliphs, expanding the reach of Islam to Egypt and Persia. Shiite Muslims believe the line of succession lies with Ali, a cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, while Sunni Muslims believe Abu Bakr as the true caliph.

**Origin of Buddhism and Hinduism in South Asia** Buddhism has a determined origin, based on the events in the life of a man. Hinduism, however, has unknown or unclear origins, not tied to a specific historical individual.

**Origin of Buddhism** Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama, born in about 563 b.c. in Lumbinī in present-day Nepal. Gautama lived a privileged life as the son of a lord. After witnessing a decrepit old man, a disease-ridden man, and a corpse on three separate journeys and determining that he could no longer enjoy his comfortable life, Gautama set out on a fourth trip and saw a monk, who taught him about withdrawal from the world. At age 29 Gautama left his palace one night and lived in a forest for the next 6 years, experimenting with techniques of meditation. Gautama emerged as the Buddha, the “awakened or enlightened one,” and spent 45 years spreading his beliefs across India. The Four Noble Truths are core to Buddhist beliefs:

1. All living beings must endure suffering.
2. Suffering, which is caused by a desire to live, leads to reincarnation.
3. The goal of all existence is to escape suffering and the endless cycle of reincarnation into Nirvana (a state of complete redemption), which is achieved through mental and moral self-purification.
4. Nirvana is attained through an Eightfold Path: rightness of belief, resolve, speech, action, livelihood, effort, thought, and meditation.

**Theravada Buddhism** Theravada is the older of the two largest branches of Buddhism. Theravada means “the way of the elders,” illustrating the Theravada Buddhist belief that they are more aligned with Buddha’s original approach. Theravadists believe that to be a good Buddhist, one must renounce worldly possessions and become a monk.

**Mahayana Buddhism** Roughly 2,000 years ago, Mahayana split from Theravada Buddhism. Mahayana is translated as “the great vehicle.” Mahayanists believe that that their approach to Buddhism can help more people because it is less demanding than the all-encompassing Theravadist system. Mahayanists emphasize Buddha’s later years of teaching and helping others, while Theravadists affirm the Buddha’s approach to self-help and introspection.

**Vajrayana Buddhism** Vajrayanas highlight the practice of rituals, known as Tantras, which have been recorded in texts. Vajrayanas believe that Buddha began to practice Tantras during his lifetime, although other Buddhists view Vajrayana as an approach to Buddhism that developed from Mahayana Buddhism several centuries later.

**Unknown Origin of Hinduism** In contrast to the universalizing religions, Hinduism has unknown origins as the religion existed before any recorded history. The earliest Hindu religious documents are about 3,500 years old. The Aryan tribes from Central Asia invaded India about 1400 b.c. and brought their religion with them. Centuries of intermingling with the Dravidians already living in the area modified their religious beliefs.

**Historical Diffusion of Religions** Universalizing religions have diffused from specific places of origin (or hearths) to other regions of the world, while most ethnic religions have generally remained clustered in a defined area. Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism all originated in Asia and diffused the world over from there.

**Diffusion of Christianity** Geographers can describe the diffusion of Christianity by reconstructing patterns of communications, interaction, and migration.

**Relocation Diffusion of Christianity** Christianity first spread from the eastern Mediterranean through relocation diffusion. Missionaries – individuals who help to transmit a universalizing religion through relocation diffusion – relayed the teachings of Jesus along the Roman Empire’s land and sea networks to people in other places.

**Expansion Diffusion of Christianity** Two types of expansion diffusion established the dominance of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire in the fourth century: hierarchical and contagious diffusion. After the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and the Emperor Theodosius proclaimed it as the empire’s official religion in 380, the religion spread into Eastern Europe through the conversion of kings and other elites over the subsequent centuries. Christianity diffused to North and South America, Australia, and New Zealand through the permanent resettlement of Europeans, and subsequent conversion of indigenous populations and intermarriage. Recently, it has further diffused to Africa.

**Diffusion of Islam** Within a century of Muhammad’s death, Muslim armies conquered areas in Africa, Asia, and Europe. Some of the territory that was conquered by Islamic armies was eventually lost and some of those areas started practicing another religion. As was the case with Christianity, Islam diffused well beyond its hearth. Indonesia, which is the world’s fourth most populous country, is predominately Muslim because Arab traders brought the religion there in the thirteenth century.

**Diffusion of Buddhism** Buddhism diffused through missionaries also but diffused rather slowly compared to Christianity and Islam. The hearth of Buddhism is in northeastern India. The person most responsible for the diffusion of Buddhism was Emperor Asoka of the Magadhan Empire. The Magadhan Empire controlled a large area of South Asia between the sixth b.c. and the eighth century a.d. and Asoka sent missionaries to territories not controlled by the empire. Merchants diffused Buddhism to China and the Chinese were quite receptive to it. It later diffused to other countries in East Asia, though it lost its original base of support in India.

**Recent Migration of Christians** Christians (along with other adherents of universalizing religions, such as Muslims and Jews) disproportionately migrate, whereas Buddhists, Hindus, folk religionists, and unaffiliated people are less likely to migrate. Jews especially have migrated from one country to another at some point of their lives, with migrants accounting for 25 percent of the Judaism’s adherents. In contrast, around 5 percent of all Christians and 4 percent of all Muslims have migrated, and only 1 or 2 percent of other religious groups migrating.

**Migration Patterns of Christians** The destinations of international migrants who are Christian is not reflected in the distribution of Christians. 12 percent of the world’s Christians reside in
North America, but is the destination for 34 percent of migrating Christians. 26 percent of the world’s Christians live in Europe, but is the destination for 38 percent of migrating Christians. In contrast, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa attract relatively few Christian migrants. The largest migration flows of Christians are in and out of Russia and the United States. Canada (except Québec) and the United States have Protestant majorities because their early colonists traveled predominantly from Protestant England. Likewise, some regions of North America are predominantly Roman Catholic due to flows from Roman Catholic areas of Europe and Latin America. Mormons are concentrated in Utah due to the migration of Brigham Young and his followers to the Salt Lake Valley in the mid-nineteenth century.

**Migration of Muslims and Jews** Compared to Christianity, the pattern of international migration of Muslims and Jews is even less reflected in the distribution of both groups around the world.

**Migration Patterns of Muslims** Although 20 percent of the world’s Muslims reside in Southwest Asia and North Africa, 34 percent of Muslim migrants are pulled to the region. Saudi Arabia attracts the largest share of Muslim migrants, making up 10 percent of the world total. The largest number of immigrants to Saudi Arabia come from Egypt. 34 percent of Muslims who migrate internationally travel to Europe, which is the home of 3 percent of the world Muslim population. Most Muslims migrate to Russia, Germany, and France when going to Europe. The largest number of Muslim immigrants to Europe have come from Turkey to Germany and from Algeria to France. In contrast, South Asia, with 30 percent of the world’s Muslims, attracts only 6 percent of the migrants.

**Migration Patterns of Jews** The diffusion of Judaism represents an exception to the usual concentrated distribution of ethnic religions. Judaism is practiced in many countries, not just in its place of origin. Jews were forced to migrate from the Eastern Mediterranean after a.d. 70, mostly into Eastern Europe. They lived among other nationalities but retained their religious practices. Many of the Jews were persecuted and forced to live in neighborhoods, known as **ghettos**, that were exclusively inhabited by Jews. The distribution of Jews changed after the mass extermination of Jews by the Nazis in World War II, when survivors migrated to Israel.

**Key Issue 3: Why Do Religions Organize Space in Distinctive Patterns?**

**Places of Worship** Sacred structures are physical “anchors” of religion. Some structures are designed for a group to gather, while others are designed for individual meditation.

**Religious Structures for Assembly** Familiar names that identify places for collective religious expression include church, basilica, mosque, temple, and synagogue.

**Christian Churches** The word *church* can be traced back to the Greek term meaning “lord,” “master,” and “power.” Church refers to both to a gathering of believers and the structure at which the gathering occurs. All three branches emphasize the congregation of people in a church to worship.
In the past, churches dominated the landscape, often being the tallest building in a village or town, often occupying a square or other prominent location. Today, churches built or extant in large cities may not hold such a dominating presence in the landscape, however, in many smaller cities and towns they remain the tallest building.

**Muslim Mosques** The word *mosque* is rooted in the Arabic for “place of worship.” Mosques are generally found in larger cities, with simpler structures present in rural villages – both serve as a place for people to gather together for worship. A mosque is designed around a central courtyard – traditionally open-air, although it may be enclosed in harsher climates. The pulpit is placed at the end of the courtyard facing Makkah. Minarets are a distinctive feature of mosques, a tower where people are summoned to worship by a man known as a muezzin.

**Sikh Gurdwaras** Sikh places of worship are known as gurdwaras. The Harmandir Sahib, or Golden Temple, in Amritsar, India, is the most important gurdwara in the world. The holiest book in Sikhism, the Guru Granth Sahib, is kept at the Golden Temple.

**Jewish Synagogues** The word *synagogue* derives from the Greek word for “assembly.” The building is often referred to by the Yiddish word shul. The origin of the synagogue is unclear – it is theorized to have emerged in the sixth century b.c., when Jews were exiled in Babylonia.

**Bahá’í Houses of Worship** Bahá’i Houses of Worship have been built in every continent in the world to give the impression to the public that Bahá’í is a universalizing religion with adherents the world over. All Bahá’í Houses of Worship are required to be built in the shape of a nonagon (a nine-sided building).

**Religious Structures for Individual Meditation** Rather than a place for groups to gather, some religious structures serve as a place of introspection and meditation.

**Buddhist Pagodas** Following Buddha’s death, his clothes and parts of his body were collected by followers as relics. These relics are kept in Buddhist religious structures known as pagoda. Pagodas typically include tall, many sided towers arranged in a series of tiers, balconies, and slanting roofs. Pagodas are not intended for congregational worship; rather, individual prayer and meditation takes place at an adjacent temple, at a remote monastery, or in a home.

**Hindu Temples** Homes are generally the location of important Hindu religious functions. A Hindu temple is a structure designed to bring individuals closer to their gods, and serves as a place for individual reflection and meditation. The size of temples is determined by local preferences and availability of resources, rather than mandated religious standards.

**Religious Settlements and Toponyms** While churches and burial sites represent smaller-scale manifestations of religion on the landscape, entire settlements centered around a religion reflect larger-scale examples of religion’s mark on the landscape.

**Utopian Settlements** A utopian settlement is an ideal community built around a religious way of life. Buildings and economic activities are planned to integrate religious principles into all aspects of daily life. The first utopian settlement in America was Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, founded by Moravian Christians in 1741. Today, Salt Lake City remains as the most prominent utopian city, founded in 1848 and designed around a plan of the city of Zion. Many utopian communities fell by the wayside due to minimal economic prospects or the members of the community maintaining celibacy.

**Religious Place Names** Roman Catholic immigrants regularly bestowed religious place names, or toponyms, to their settlements in the New World. These religious toponyms are especially prevalent in Québec and the U.S. Southwest.

**Administration of Space** The method of communication and consistency of doctrine varies between universalizing religions, branches, and denominations, although some administration is present. In ethnic religions, centralized authorities generally do not exist.

**Hierarchical Religions** Universalizing religions may have hierarchical structures where leadership at a local level reports to a higher-order regional level until a final authority, governing the entire branch, is at the top of the hierarchy. These **hierarchical religions** have a well-defined geographic extent, with territory organized into local administrative units.

**Latter-Day Saints** The Mormons exercise strong organization of the landscape. The territory occupied by Mormons is managed by the president and board of the Mormon Church. Small-scale units of territory known as wards comprise about 750 people. These wards then make up stakes, a larger unit of territory with a population of roughly 5,000 people.

**Roman Catholic Hierarchy** The Roman Catholic Church has organized much of Earth’s inhabited land into an administrative structure ultimately accountable to the Pope in Rome. Priests report to bishops, who in turn report to archbishops. Archbishops report then to the Pope. The Catholic Church divides the world into parishes (headed by a priest), which may be as small as only a few square kilometers and less than a thousand people or as large as several hundred square miles and 5,000 people.

**Locally Autonomous Religions** Other faiths, known as **autonomous religions**, give authority to individual churches and only loosely coordinate their operations.

**Local Autonomy in Islam** Islam provides a great deal of local autonomy because it does not have a formal religious hierarchy or formal territorial organization. Strong unity within the Islamic world is maintained by a relatively high degree of communication.

**Protestant Denominations** Protestant Christian denominations vary in geographic structure from extremely autonomous to somewhat hierarchical. Episcopalian, Lutheran, and most Methodist churches resemble the Roman Catholic Church in its hierarchical structure, while Baptist and United Church of Christ congregations are extremely autonomous.

**Ethnic Religions** Hinduism is an example of a highly autonomous religion, because worship is generally performed alone or with others in a household. Hinduism has no centralized structure of religious authority.

**Sacred Places in Universalizing Religions** Universalizing religions are more likely to consider places holy that are associated with key events in the founder’s life, whereas ethnic religions’ holy places are tied to physical features present in their hearths, such as mountains, rivers, or rock formations. This can be observed in the holy places of Buddhism and Islam, which trace the movements of the Buddha and Muhammad. **Pilgrimages**, journeys to places considered sacred by religions, are a part of Buddhist and Muslim life.

**Buddhist Shrines** Buddhism recognizes eight places as the holiest on Earth, with four of them concentrated in northeastern India and southern Nepal. The four aforementioned locations are important places in Buddha’s life, and are homes to either shrines or ruins of shrines. These locations are Lumbinī, Bōdh Gayā, Deer Park in Sarnath, and Kuśinagara. The four remaining locations are sites where miracles performed by Buddha occurred: Srāvastī, Sāmkāśya, Rajagrha, and Vaisālā. These four sites are in ruins.

**Holy Places in Islam** The holiest places in Islam are in cities associated with the life of Muhammad. The Great Mosque, Masjid al-Haram, is located in Makkah and is the largest mosque in the world. In the Great Mosque is the al-Ka’ba, a cubelike structure thought by Muslims to have been built by Abraham and Ishmael. Inside the Ka’ba is a black stone given to Abraham by Gabriel that is considered by Muslims to signify the covenant with Ishmael and the Muslim people. Muslims, if financially and physically able, are expected to undertake a pilgrimage, or hajj, to Makkah in their lifetimes. Madinah is also a holy city in Islam, and is home to the world’s second-largest mosque.

**The Landscape in Ethnic Religions** Ethnic religious holy places are typically based on the physical environment of the hearth region of that religion.

**Hinduism’s South Asian Landscape** The physical geography of India is integral to Hinduism. Indian riverbanks and coastlines are likely to rank among the holiest shrines in Hinduism, according to the geographer Surinder Bhardwaj. Hindus undertake pilgrimages, known as tirthas, to these holy sites as an act of purification. Tirthas to the Ganges, the holiest river in Hinduism, are undertaken as the Ganges is believed by Hindus to have sprung forth from the hair of Shiva. Mt. Kailās, located at the source of the Ganges, is said to be the home of Shiva, and is also a tirtha destination.

**Cosmogony and Spirits Cosmogony** refers to a religion’s conception of the relationship between humans and nature. A variety of events in the physical environment are more likely to be incorporated into the principles of an ethnic religion. Religious interpretations of this relationship vary from treating the environment as something to be respected for its spiritual nature to something to be dominated for maximum human benefit. Most universalizing religions believe that humans should modify the natural environment. Muslims and Christians believe they can serve God by cultivating land, draining wetlands, clearing forests, building new settlements, and otherwise making productive use of natural features that God created.

**Disposing of the Dead** Religions observe different practices in the disposal of their adherents’ remains.

**Burial** Christians, Muslims, and Jews all practice burial in dedicated cemeteries. Cemeteries are used as parks in Muslim countries, where the idea of using a cemetery as public open space faces less opposition than in Christian societies. In some countries, burying of the dead can remove arable land from being used. In China, for instance, roughly 10 percent of the land from productive agriculture is removed by burial sites.

**Other Methods of Disposing of Bodies** Hindus favor cremation to burial. Hindus consider cremation an act of purification because it frees the body from the soul for departure to the afterworld. Other groups, such as Tibetan Buddhists, leave the body exposed for scavengers or dispose of the human remains at sea.

**Religious Calendars** Calendars observed by universalizing and ethnic religions vary based on their defining characteristics. In ethnic religions, the physical geography of their hearths may play a role in determining holidays. In universalizing religions, major holidays reflect events in the life of the founder rather than traits of the physical landscape.

**The Calendar in Universalizing Religions** In universalizing religions, the calendar tends to be more oriented to holidays celebrating events in the founder’s life.

**Islam** Islam observes a lunar calendar. In a 30-year cycle, the Islamic calendar has 19 years with
354 days and 11 years with 355 days. As a result, Muslim holidays occur on different dates in different seasons from generation to generation.

**Christianity** Christians observe the resurrection of Jesus on Easter and his birth on Christmas. Eastern Orthodox Christians use the Julian calendar instead of the Gregorian calendar, so they actually celebrate Easter at a different day than Catholics and Protestants.

**Buddhism** Buddhists celebrate the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and death. However, not all Buddhists recognize these holidays on the same days.

**Sikhism** Sikhs observe the birthdays and dates of death of the 10 Sikh gurus. A major holiday in Sikhism is the day when the Holy Granth Sahib was installed as its holy text.

**Bahá’í** Bahá’í employs a calendar established by the Báb and confirmed by Bahá’u’lláh, in which the year is divided into 19 months of 19 days each, with the addition of 4 extra days (with 5 in leap years).

**The Calendar in Judaism** Judaism bases their calendar on the agricultural calendar of the religion’s homeland in present day Israel. The agricultural holidays later gained importance because they
also commemorated events in the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. The observation of the
solstices is important to some ethnic religions, but Judaism uses the lunar calendar rather than the solar calendar.

**The Solstice** The **Solstice**, derived from the Latin to “stand still,” holds a significant purpose in some ethnic religions. The winter solstice (December 21 or 22 in the Northern Hemisphere) is a major holiday in some pagan religions. Stonehenge is an ancient monument in southwestern England that is apparently constructed to align with the sun in the summer and winter solstices.

**Key Issue 4: Why Do Territorial Conflicts Arise Among Religious Groups?**

**Challenges for Religions in South and East Asia** Evolving cultural, political, and economic customs can sometimes be at odds with traditional religious values. In South Asia, Hinduism has recently come into conflict with secular ideas introduced from the West. In East Asia, Communist doctrine has challenged Buddhism and its place in society.

**India: Hinduism and Social Equality** The caste system of the Hindu religion has been challenged by outside forces since the British colonization of India in the nineteenth century. The **caste** system indicated the class or distinct hereditary order into which a Hindu was born, according to religious law. When the Aryans invaded India circa 1500 b.c., they divided themselves into four castes that stratified social and economic position. These four castes are:

1. Brahmans, the priests and top administrators.
2. Kshatriyas, or warriors.
3. Vaisyas, or merchants.
4. Shudras, or agricultural workers and artisans.

A fifth class of people, Dalits (untouchables), were theorized to have descended from the indigenous people who were invaded by the Aryans. Until recently, social relations between the castes were limited, and the rights of non-Brahmans, especially Dalits, were restricted. In recent years, the caste system has grown relatively relaxed.

**Religion and Communism** Religions have conflicted with communist governments, which have either downplayed the role of religion in everyday life or worked actively against religions. The Soviet Union pursued antireligious programs because the government believed that religious doctrine was a potential threat to the success of the country. All church buildings and property were nationalized and could be used only with local government permission. Countries with majority Muslim populations that were once a part of the Soviet Union (e.g. Uzbekistan) are conflicted in maintaining previously secular laws or rewriting them to conform to Islamic tradition. Conflict between communism and religion is evident today in relations between the People’s Republic of China government and its autonomous Xizang (widely known as Tibet) province.

**Challenges for Religions in Central and Southwest Asia** Religious disputes have become embedded in ethnic and political conflicts in Central and Southwest Asia.

**Central Asia: Taliban and Western Values** The vast majority of Afghans are Muslims, comprising
99 percent of the population. Adversarial relations among groups with differing ideas of the role of Islam in society has fueled conflicts in the country. A resurgence of religious fundamentalism has especially stoked conflict. Religious **fundamentalism** is a literal interpretation and a strict and intense adherence to what fundamentalist doctrine defines as basic principles of a religion. The Taliban, a fundamentalist group in Afghanistan, took control of the country in 1996 and imposed strict laws inspired by Islamic values as interpreted by the group. For instance, “western, non-Islamic” activities such as playing music were banned. A U.S.-led coalition overthrew the Taliban in 2001, although they have regained control of parts of the country and neighboring Pakistan.

**Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Southwest Asia** Jews, Christians, and Muslims have fought one another for control of a small strip of land in the Eastern Mediterranean (or Middle East) in a prolonged series of conflicts. These conflicts are the result of overlapping histories of the three religions. The Crusades were a series of wars fought against Muslims in the Middle East by Christians intent on reclaiming Jerusalem. The Muslim Ottoman Empire controlled Palestine/Israel for most of four centuries between 1516 and 1917. Upon the Ottoman Empire’s defeat in World War I, the United Kingdom took control of the region. The present-day conflict in Palestine/Israel has its roots in ancient history but more recently with the creation of the state of Israel by the United Nations in 1947.

**Geographic Perspectives in the Middle East** Conflict in the Middle East currently takes place between various countries and groups of people with ambitions to control territory. Differences in religious traditions and their adoption in nationalist ideologies influence the origins of the conflicts and the barriers to peacefully resolving them.

**Wars Between Israel and Neighbors** Following the United Nations’ 1947 partitioning of the United Kingdom’s Palestine Mandate into two independent states, four wars unfolded as a result of conflicting claims over territory in the region. The 1948-1949 Independence War, 1956 Suez Canal War, 1967 Six-Day War, and 1973 Yom Kippur War were major conflicts that took place in the mid-nineteenth century, with territory such as the Old City of Jerusalem changing hands several times. In the Six-Day War, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, and the Sinai Peninsula were all captured by Israel. In the Camp David Accords, U.S. President Jimmy Carter mediated an agreement between Egypt’s President Anwar Sadat and Israel’s Prime Minister Menachem Begin where Israel returned control of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in exchange for Egypt’s recognition of Israel as a sovereign nation.

**Competing Israeli and Palestinian Perspectives** Conflict today centers around the status of the West Bank of the Jordan River, the Golan Heights, and the Gaza Strip, which are all territories under Israeli control but claimed by the Palestinians.

**Israeli Perspectives** The relatively small size of the state of Israel and its three distinct physiographic regions (the coastal plain, a series of hills, and the Jordan River valley) all play a role in Israel’s conception of its dealing with its neighbors. Following the aforementioned wars and the contested Israeli control of specific territories, the West Bank has emerged as a source of much present-day conflict. Israelis occupy areas of the West Bank, comprising 17 percent of its population. Israelis have moved to the area due to their perceived right to live in their historical homeland, and lack of affordable housing in Israel’s pre-1967 borders. Some Israelis support compromising with Palestine, while others wish to retain some control of the West Bank.

**Palestinian Perspectives** Five groups of people consider themselves Palestinian:

* People living in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem territories captured by Israel in 1967.
* Some citizens of Israel who are Arabs.
* People who fled from Israel to other countries after the 1948-1949 war.
* People who fled from the West Bank or Gaza to other countries after the 1967 Six-Day War.
* Some citizens of other countries, especially Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.

Until his death in 2004, Yassir Arafat lead the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the fight against Israel. Israel permits a limited form of government for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, called the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinians are generally not satisfied with either the territory or the power they have been given thus far. Currently, the struggle for power between the Fatah and Hamas parties colors many internal conflicts.

**Jerusalem’s Challenging Geography** Jerusalem feature sites holy to Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Controlling Jerusalem represents a key geographic problem to peace in the region.

**Judaism’s Jerusalem** Jerusalem is particularly holy to Jews as the location of the Temple, their center of worship in ancient times. The First Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 b.c., and the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in a.d. 70. The Western Wall of the Second Temple remains today. Following the capture of the Old City of Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War, the Western Wall became a site for daily prayers by observant Jews. Walls have been constructed along the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the suburbs of Jerusalem to deter Palestinian suicide bombers from entering Jerusalem and the rest of Israel. The West Bank wall is particularly controversial as it places on Israel’s side around
10 percent of the land, home to between 10,000 and 50,000 Palestinians.

**Islam’s Jerusalem** The holiest Muslim structure in Jerusalem is the Dome of the Rock, built in a.d.
691. Muslims believe that the large rock beneath the structure’s dome is the place from which Muhammad ascended to heaven, as well as the altar on which Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac (according to Jews and Christians) or his son Ishmael (according to Muslims). The al-Aqsa Mosque was built on the site of the ruins of the Jewish Second Temple. However, because the holy Muslim structures literally sit on top of the holy Jewish structures, the two sets of holy structures cannot be logically divided by a line on a map.