

# Religion

*And He shall judge between the nations,  
And shall decide for many peoples;  
And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
And their spears into pruning-hooks:  
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
Neither shall they learn war any more.*

*Isaiah 2:4*

**T**his passage from the Bible, the holiest book of Christianity and Judaism, is one of the most eloquent pleas for peace among the nations of the world. For many religious people, especially in the Western Hemisphere and Europe, Isaiah evokes a highly attractive image of the ideal future landscape.

Islam's holiest book, the Quran (sometimes spelled Koran), also evokes powerful images of a peaceful landscape:

*He it is who sends down water from the sky, whence ye have drink,  
and whence the trees grow whereby ye feed your flocks.  
He makes the corn to grow, and the olives, and the palms, and the  
grapes, and some of every fruit; verily, in that is a sign unto a people  
who reflect.*

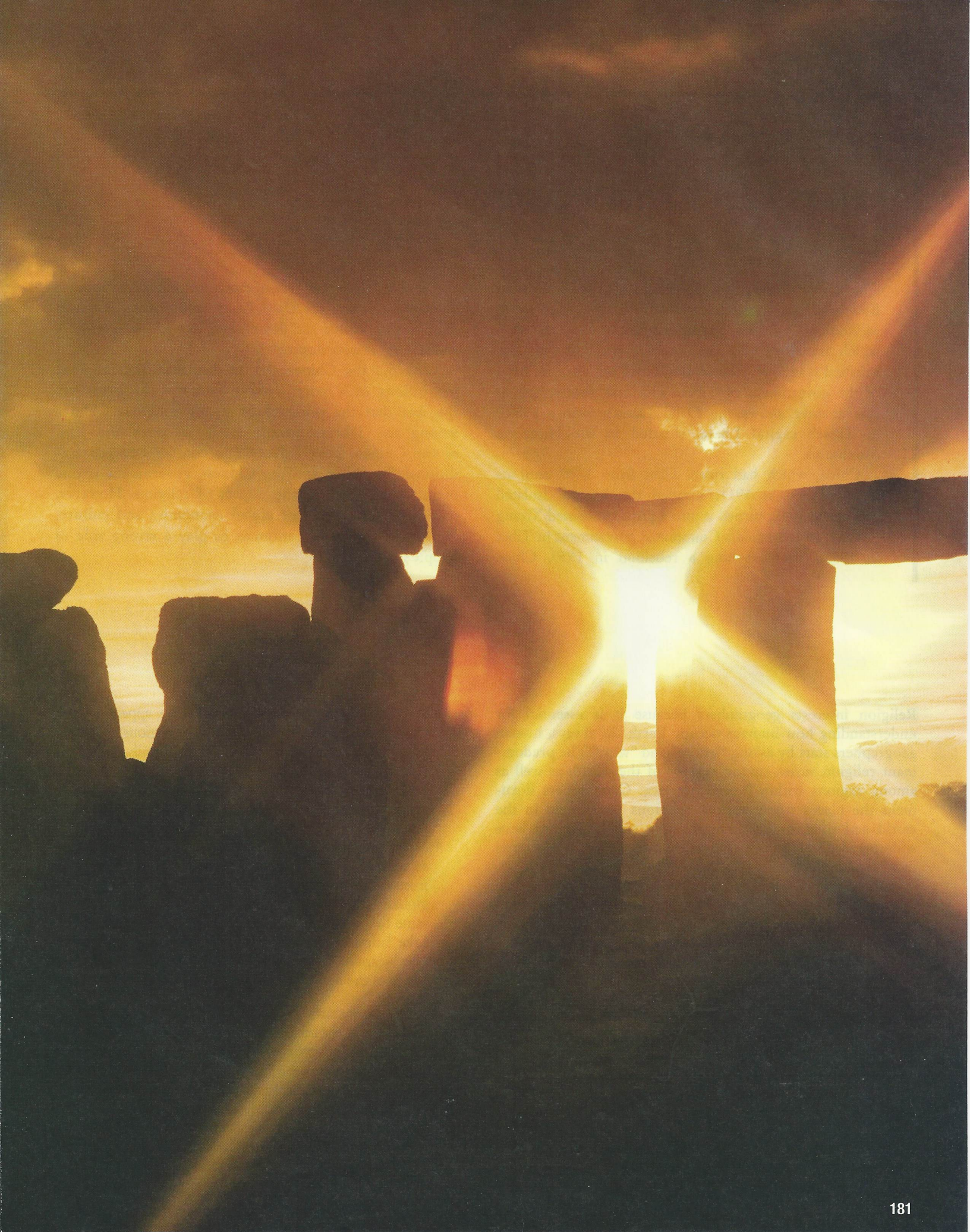
*Sûrah (Chapter) of the Bee XVI.9*

Most religious people pray for peace, but religious groups may not share the same vision of how peace will be achieved. Geographers see that the process by which one religion diffuses across the landscape may conflict with the distribution of others. Geographers are concerned with the regional distribution of different religions and the resulting potential for conflict.

Geographers also observe that religions are derived in part from elements of the physical environment, and that religions, in turn, modify the landscape. As evidence of this, note the rich agricultural images in the passages just quoted from the Bible and the Quran.

## KEY ISSUES

1. Where are religions distributed?
2. Why do religions have different distributions?
3. Why do religions organize space in distinctive patterns?
4. Why do territorial conflicts arise among religious groups?



## CASE STUDY

# The Dalai Lama Versus the People's Republic of China

The Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists, is as important to that religion as the Pope is to Roman Catholics. Traditionally, the Dalai Lama—which translates as *oceanic teacher*—was not only the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism but also the head of the government of Tibet. The first photograph of this chapter shows the Dalai Lama's former palace in Tibet's capital Lhasa, situated in the Himalaya Mountains.

China, which had ruled Tibet from 1720 until its independence in 1911, invaded the rugged, isolated country in 1950, turned it into a province named Xizang in 1951, and installed a Communist government in Tibet in 1953. After crushing a rebellion in 1959, China

executed or imprisoned tens of thousands and forced another 100,000, including the Dalai Lama, to emigrate. Buddhist temples were closed and demolished, and religious artifacts and scriptures were destroyed.

Why did the Chinese try to dismantle the religious institutions of a poor, remote country? At issue was the fact that the presence of strong religious feelings among the Tibetan people conflicted with the aims of the Chinese government. The conflict between traditional Buddhism and the Chinese government is one of many examples of the impact of religion. However, in the modern world of global economics and culture, local religious belief continues to play a strong role in people's lives.

Religion interests geographers because it is essential for understanding how humans occupy Earth. As always, human geographers start by asking “where” and “why.” The predominant religion varies among *regions* of the world, as well as among regions within North America. Geographers document the places *where* various religions are located in the world and offer explanations for why some religions have widespread distributions, whereas others are highly clustered in particular *places*.

To understand *why* some religions occupy more *space* than others, geographers must look at differences among practices of various faiths. Geographers, though, are not theologians, so they stay focused on those elements of religions that are geographically significant. Geographers study spatial *connections* in religion: the distinctive place of origin of religions, the extent of diffusion of religions from their places of origin, the processes by which religions diffused to other locations, and the religious practices and beliefs that lead some religions to have more widespread distributions.

Geographers find the tension in *scale* between *globalization* and *local diversity* especially acute in religion for a number of reasons:

- People care deeply about their religion and draw from religion their core values and beliefs, an essential element of the definition of culture.

- Some religions are actually *designed* to appeal to people throughout the world, whereas other religions are designed to appeal primarily to people in geographically limited areas.
- Religious values are important in understanding not only how people identify themselves, as was the case with language, but also the meaningful ways that they organize the landscape.
- Most (though not all) religions require exclusive adherence, so adopting a global religion usually requires turning away from a traditional local religion, whereas people can learn a globally important language such as English and at the same time still speak the language of their local culture.
- Like language, migrants take their religion with them to new locations, but although migrants typically learn the language of the new location, they retain their religion.

This chapter starts by describing the distribution of major religions, then in the second section explains why some religions have diffused widely, whereas others have not. As a major facet of culture, religion leaves a strong imprint on the physical environment, discussed in the third section of the chapter. Religion, like other cultural characteristics, can be a source of pride and a means of identification with a distinct culture. Unfortunately, intense identification with one religion can lead adherents into conflict with followers of other religions, discussed in the fourth key issue of the chapter.

## KEY ISSUE 1

### Where Are Religions Distributed?

- Universalizing religions
- Ethnic religions

Only a few religions can claim the adherence of large numbers of people. Each of these faiths has a distinctive distribution across Earth's surface (Figure 6-1).

Geographers distinguish two types of religions: universalizing and ethnic. **Universalizing religions** attempt to be global, to appeal to all people, wherever they may live in the world, not just to those of one culture or location. An **ethnic religion** appeals primarily to one group of people living in one place. About 62 percent of the world's population adhere to a universalizing religion, 24 percent to an ethnic religion, and 14 percent to no religion. This section examines the world's three main universalizing religions and some representative ethnic religions.

### Universalizing Religions

The three main universalizing religions are Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. Each of the three is divided into branches, denominations, and sects. A **branch** is a large and fundamental division within a religion. A **denomination** is a division of a branch that unites a number of local congregations in a single legal and administrative body. A **sect** is a relatively small group that has broken away from an established denomination.

#### Christianity

Christianity has more than 2 billion adherents, far more than any other world religion, and has the most widespread distribution. It is the predominant religion in North America, South America, Europe, and Australia, and countries with a Christian majority exist in Africa and Asia as well.

**BRANCHES OF CHRISTIANITY.** Christianity has three major branches—Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox. Roman Catholics comprise 52 percent of the world's Christians, Protestants 21 percent, and Eastern Orthodox 10 percent. In addition, 22 percent of Christians belong to churches that do not consider themselves within one of the above three branches, and 5 percent of self-professed Christians are unaffiliated with any church. This list adds up to 110 percent, because 10 percent of Christians have been baptized in more than one church and have therefore been counted more than once.

Within Europe, Roman Catholicism is the dominant Christian branch in the southwest and east, Protestantism in the northwest, and Eastern Orthodoxy in the east and southeast (Figure 6-2). The regions of Roman Catholic and Protestant majorities frequently have sharp boundaries, even when they run through the middle of countries. For example, the Netherlands and Switzerland have approximately equal percentages of Roman Catholics and Protestants, but the

Roman Catholic populations are concentrated in the south of these countries and the Protestant populations in the north.

The Eastern Orthodox branch of Christianity is a collection of 14 self-governing churches in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. More than 40 percent of all Eastern Orthodox Christians belong to one of these 14—the Russian Orthodox Church. Christianity came to Russia in the tenth century, and the Russian Orthodox Church was established in the sixteenth century.

Nine of the other 13 self-governing churches were established in the nineteenth or twentieth century. The largest of these nine, the Romanian Church, includes 20 percent of all Eastern Orthodox Christians. The Bulgarian, Greek, and Serbian Orthodox churches have approximately 10 percent each. The other five recently established Orthodox churches—Albania, Cyprus, Georgia, Poland, and Sinai—combined have about 2 percent of all Eastern Orthodox Christians.

The remaining four of the 14 Eastern Orthodox churches—Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem—trace their origins to the earliest days of Christianity. They have a combined membership of about 3 percent of all Eastern Orthodox Christians.

**CHRISTIANITY IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE.** The overwhelming percentage of people living in the Western Hemisphere—nearly 90 percent—are Christian. About 5 percent belong to other religions, and the remaining 6 percent profess adherence to no religion.

A fairly sharp boundary exists within the Western Hemisphere in the predominant branches of Christianity. Roman Catholics comprise 93 percent of Christians in Latin America, compared with 29 percent in North America. Within North America, Roman Catholics are clustered in the southwestern and north-eastern United States and the Canadian province of Québec.

Protestant churches have approximately 83 million members, or about 28 percent of the U.S. population. Baptist churches have the largest number of adherents in the United States, about 35 million combined (Table 6-1). The next three largest Protestant denominations in the United States are Methodist, Pentecostal, and Lutheran.

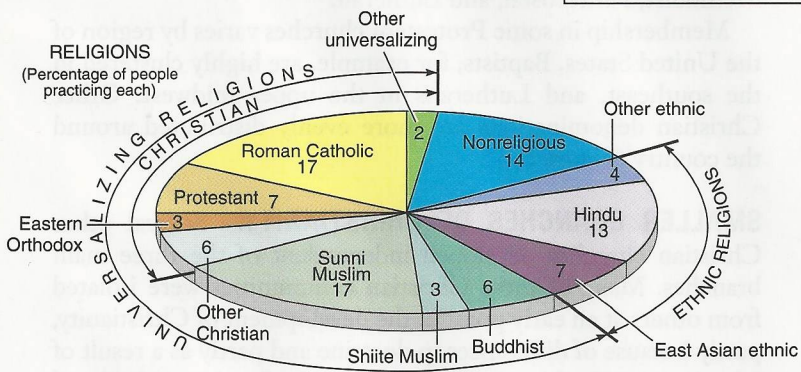
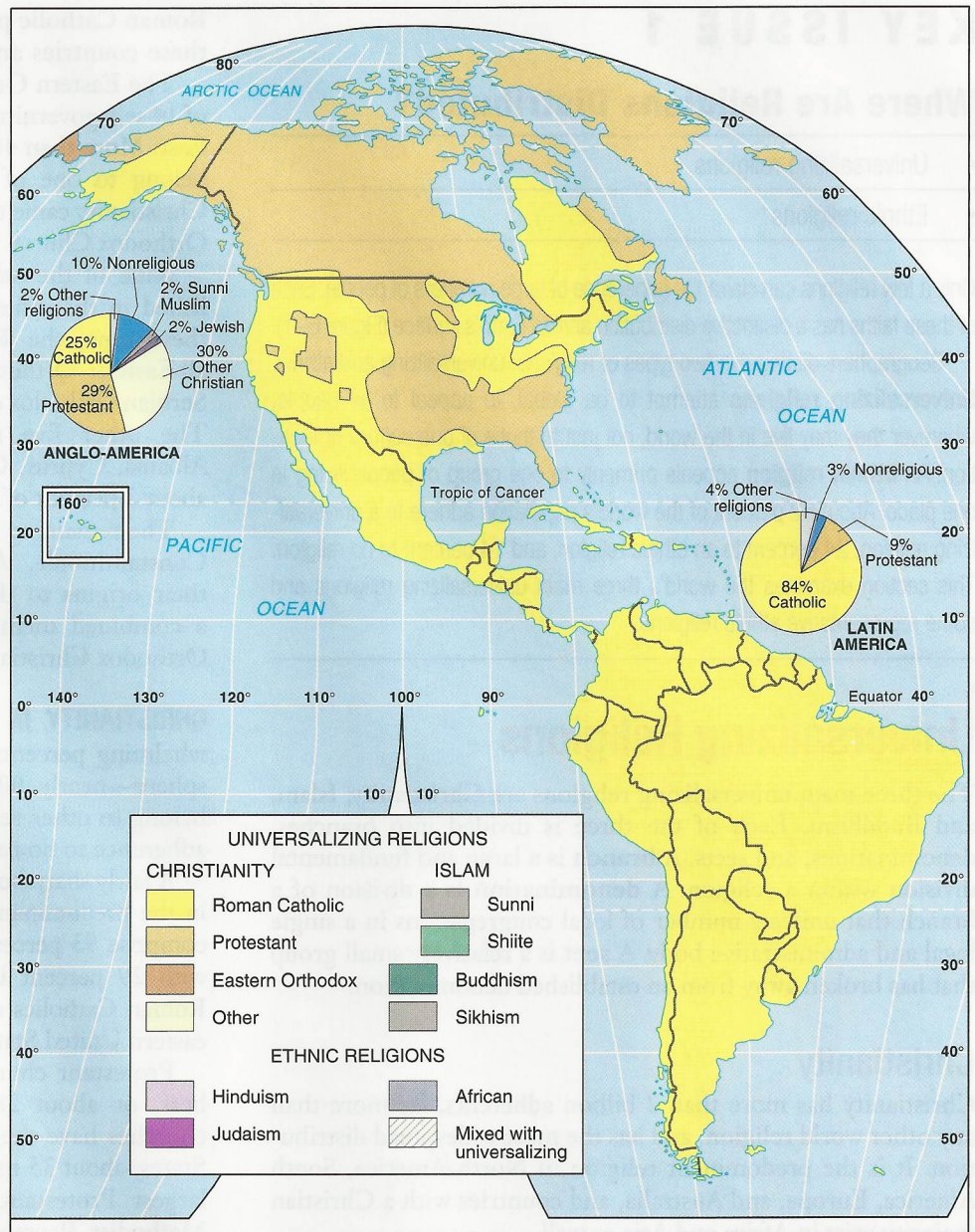
Membership in some Protestant churches varies by region of the United States. Baptists, for example, are highly clustered in the southeast, and Lutherans in the upper midwest. Other Christian denominations are more evenly distributed around the country (Figure 6-3).

**SMALLER BRANCHES OF CHRISTIANITY.** Several other Christian churches developed independent of the three main branches. Many of these Christian communities were isolated from others at an early point in the development of Christianity, partly because of differences in doctrine and partly as a result of Islamic control of intervening territory in Southwest Asia and North Africa. Two small Christian churches survive in northeast Africa—the Coptic Church of Egypt and the Ethiopian Church. The Ethiopian Church, with perhaps 10 million adherents, split from the Egyptian Coptic Church in 1948, although it traces its roots to the fourth century, when two shipwrecked Christians, who were taken as slaves, ultimately converted the Ethiopian king to Christianity.

**FIGURE 6-1** World distribution of religions. More than two-thirds of Earth's people adhere to one of four religions:

- Christianity: 33 percent, especially in Europe and the Western Hemisphere
- Islam: 20 percent, especially in northern Africa and Southwest and Southeast Asia
- Hinduism: 13 percent, virtually all in India
- Buddhism: 6 percent, especially in East and South-east Asia

Eleven percent adhere to one of a number of ethnic religions based in Africa or Asia. Three percent belong to another universalizing religion. The remaining 14 percent are nonreligious or atheists. In China and sub-Saharan Africa, many people profess adherence to both an ethnic and a universalizing religion. The small pie charts on the map show the overall proportion of the world's religions in each world region. The large pie chart below shows the worldwide percentage of people adhering to the various religions.



The Armenian Church originated in Antioch, Syria, and was important in diffusing Christianity to South and East Asia between the seventh and thirteenth centuries. The church's few present-day adherents are concentrated in Lebanon and Armenia, as well as in northeastern Turkey and western Azerbaijan. Despite the small number of adherents, the Armenian Church, like other small sects, plays a significant role in regional conflicts. For example,

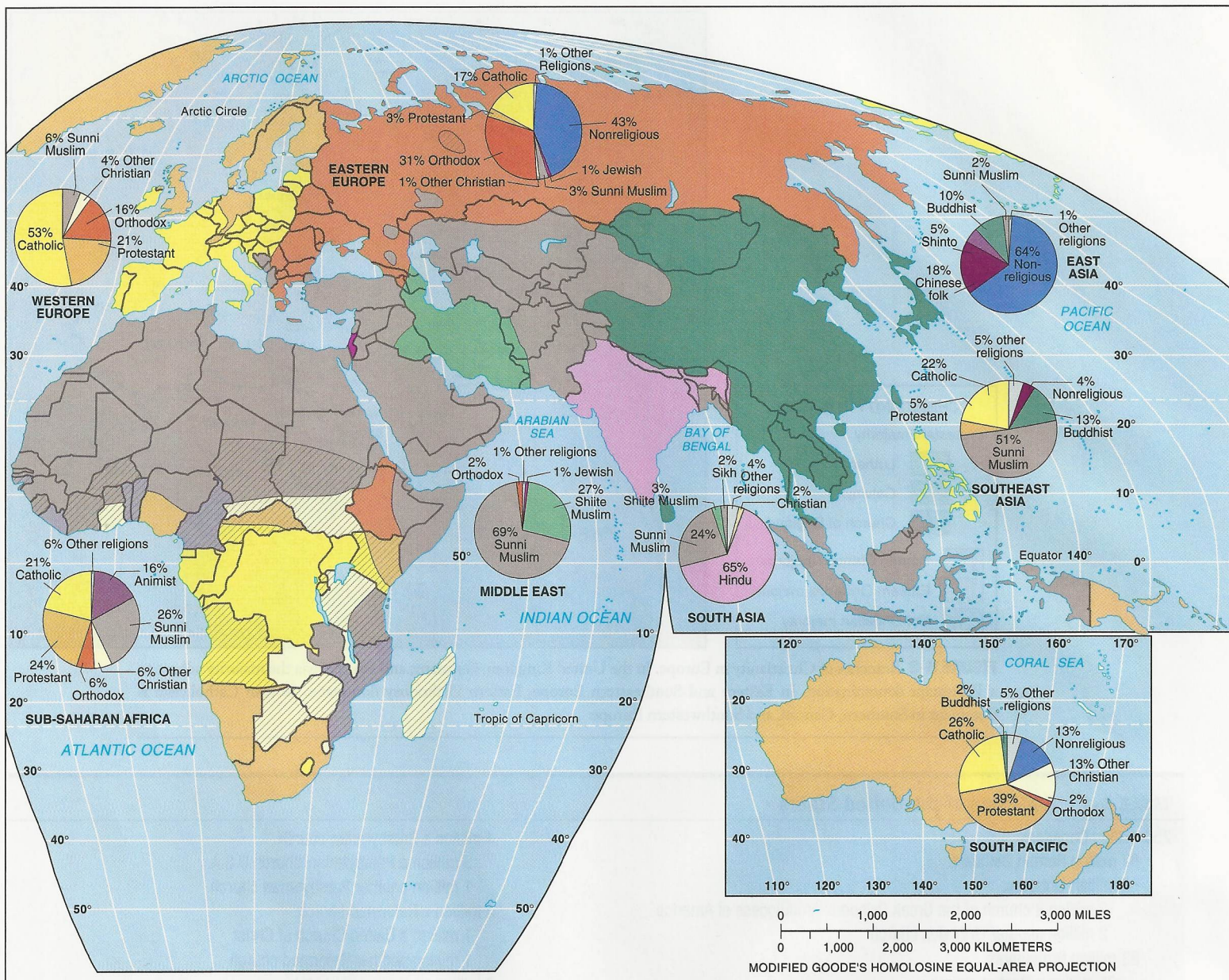
Armenian Christians have fought for the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh, a portion of Azerbaijan, because Nagorno-Karabakh is predominantly Armenian, whereas the remainder of Azerbaijan is overwhelmingly Shiite Muslim (see Chapter 7).

The Maronites are another example of a small Christian sect that plays a disproportionately prominent role in political unrest. They are clustered in Lebanon, which has suffered through a long civil war fought among religious groups (see Chapter 7).

In the United States, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) regard their church as a branch of Christianity separate from other branches. About 3 percent of Americans are members of the Latter-Day Saints, a large percentage clustered in Utah and surrounding states.

### Islam

Islam, the religion of 1.3 billion people, is the predominant religion of the Middle East from North Africa to Central Asia (Figure 6-1). However, half of the world's Muslims live in four



countries outside the Middle East—Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. The word *Islam* in Arabic means “submission to the will of God,” and it has a similar root to the Arabic word for *peace*. An adherent of the religion of Islam is known as a Muslim, which in Arabic means “one who surrenders to God.”

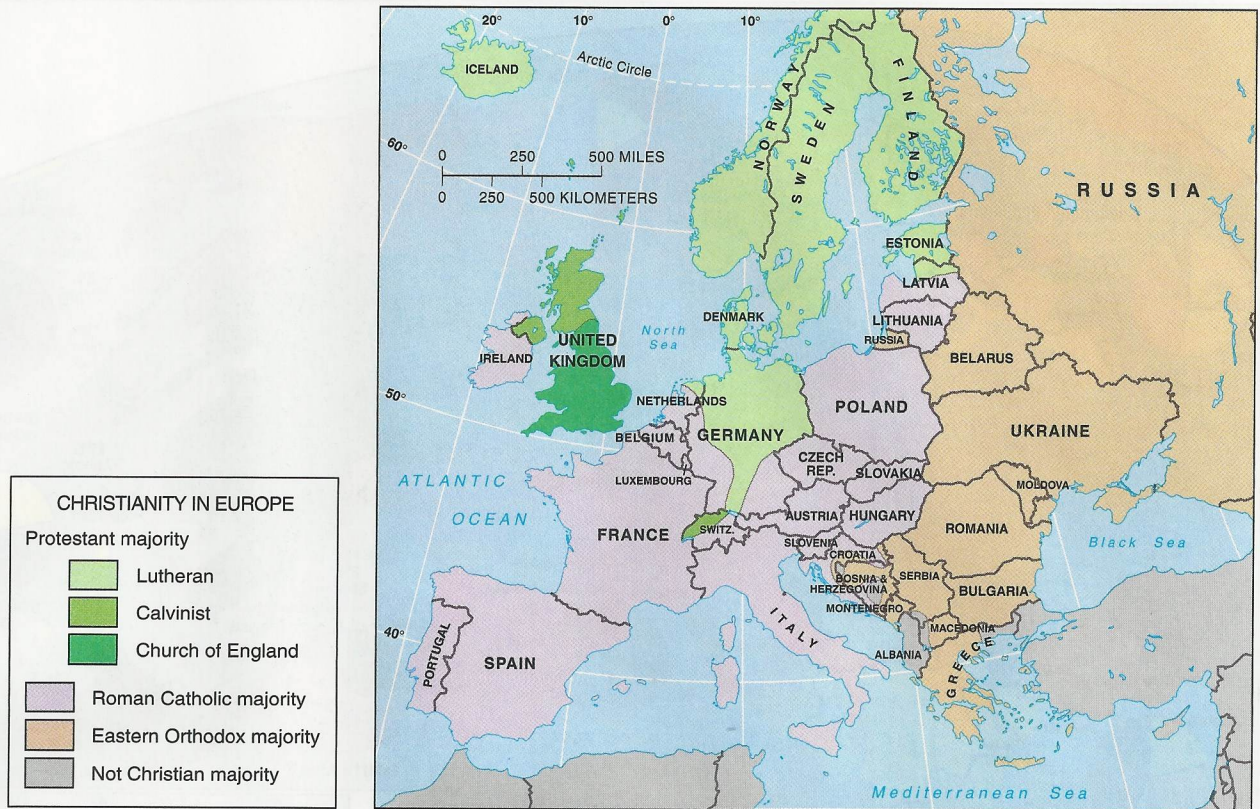
The core of Islamic belief is represented by five pillars of faith:

1. There is no god worthy of worship except the one God, the source of all creation, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.
2. Five times daily, a Muslim prays, facing the city of Makkah (Mecca), as a direct link to God.
3. A Muslim gives generously to charity, as an act of purification and growth.
4. A Muslim fasts during the month of Ramadan, as an act of self-purification.
5. If physically and financially able, a Muslim makes a pilgrimage to Makkah.

**BRANCHES OF ISLAM.** Islam is divided into two important branches: *Sunni* (from the Arabic word for *orthodox*) and *Shiite* (from the Arabic word for *sectarian*, sometimes written *Shia* in English). Sunnis comprise 83 percent of Muslims and are the largest branch in most Muslim countries in the Middle East and Asia (see Figure 6–1).

Sixteen percent of Muslims are Shiites, clustered in a handful of countries. Nearly 30 percent of all Shiites live in Iran, 15 percent in Pakistan, and 10 percent in Iraq. Shiites comprise nearly 90 percent of the population in Iran and more than half of the population in Azerbaijan, Iraq, and the less populous countries of Oman and Bahrain.

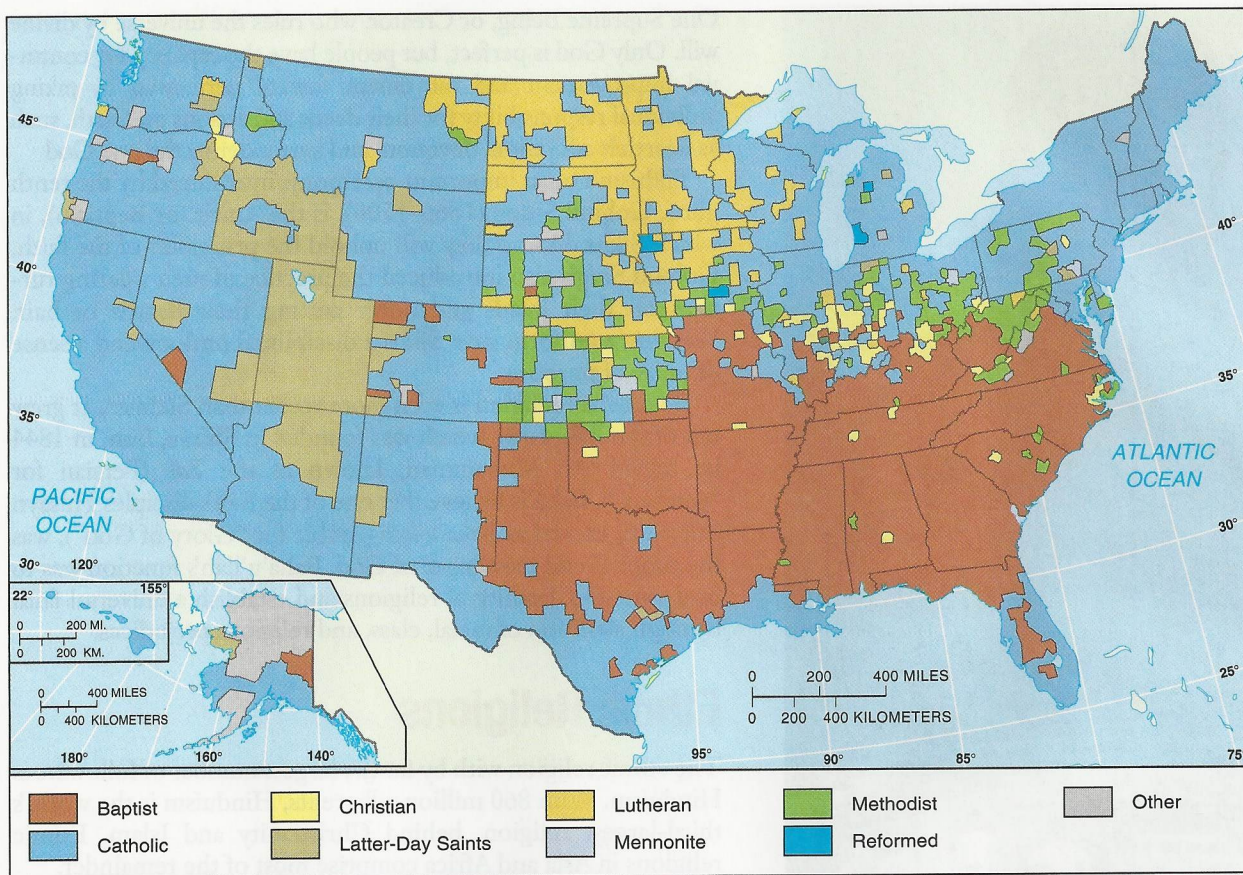
**ISLAM IN NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE.** The Muslim population of North America and Europe has increased rapidly in recent years. In Europe, Muslims account for 5 percent of the population. France has the largest Muslim population,



**FIGURE 6-2** Branches of Christianity in Europe. In the United Kingdom, Germany, and Scandinavia the majority adhere to a Protestant denomination. In Eastern and Southeastern Europe, Eastern Orthodoxy dominates. Roman Catholicism is dominant in Southern, Central, and Southwestern Europe.

**TABLE 6-1** Religions of the United States

250 million Christians	4 million a Presbyterian church
67 million Roman Catholics	3 million a Presbyterian Church U.S.A.
4 million Orthodox	1 million another Presbyterian church
2 million a church of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America	2 million a Reformed church
2 million another Orthodox church	1 million a United Church of Christ
83 million Protestants	1 million another Reformed church
35 million a Baptist church	2 million an Episcopal church
16 million a Southern Baptist Convention church	2 million a Church of the United Brethren in Christ
5 million a National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., church	2 million one of the Churches of Christ
5 million a National Baptist Convention of America church	1 million a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
3 million a National Missionary Baptist Convention of America church	1 million a Seventh Day Adventist church
3 million a Progressive National Baptist Convention church	3 million another Protestant church
3 million another Baptist church	96 million other Christians
12 million a Methodist church	6 million a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
8 million a United Methodist church	1 million a Jehovah's Witness church
4 million an African Methodist Episcopal or Episcopal Zion church	89 million marginal Christians, unaffiliated with a church, or affiliated with multiple churches
11 million a Pentecostal church	7 million Muslims
5 million a Church of God in Christ	5 million Sunni and Shiite Muslims
3 million one of the Assemblies of God churches	2 million Black Muslims
2 million one of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the world churches	6 million Jews
1 million another Pentecostal church	3 million Buddhists
8 million a Lutheran church	1 million Bahá'ís
5 million an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	1 million Hindus
2 million one of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod churches	4 million other faiths
1 million another Lutheran church	30 million nonreligious or atheist



**FIGURE 6-3** Distribution of Christians in the United States. The shaded areas are U.S. counties in which more than 50 percent of church membership is concentrated in either Roman Catholicism or one Protestant denomination. Baptists are concentrated in the Southeast, Lutherans in the Upper Midwest, Mormons in Utah and contiguous states, and Roman Catholics in the Northeast and Southwest. The distinctive distribution of religious groups within the United States results from patterns of migration, especially from Europe in the nineteenth century and from Latin America in recent years.

about 4 million, a legacy of immigration from predominantly Muslim former colonies in North Africa. Germany has about 3 million Muslims, also a legacy of immigration, in Germany's case primarily from Turkey. In Southeast Europe, Albania, Bosnia, and Serbia each have about 2 million Muslims.

The United States and Canada are home to approximately 5 million Muslims, an increase from only a few hundred thousand in 1990. Islam also has a presence in the United States through the Nation of Islam, also known as Black Muslims, founded in Detroit in 1930 and led for more than 40 years by Elijah Muhammad, who called himself "the messenger of Allah."

Black Muslims lived austere and advocated a separate autonomous nation within the United States for their adherents. Tension between Muhammad and a Black Muslim minister, Malcolm X, divided the sect during the 1960s. After a pilgrimage to Makkah in 1963, Malcolm X converted to orthodox Islam and founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity. He was assassinated in 1965.

After Muhammad's death, in 1975, his son Wallace D. Muhammad led the Black Muslims closer to the principles of orthodox Islam, and the organization's name was changed to the American Muslim Mission. A splinter group adopted the original name, Nation of Islam, and continues to follow the separatist teachings of Elijah Muhammad.

## Buddhism

Buddhism, the third of the world's major universalizing religions, has nearly 400 million adherents, who are mainly found in China and Southeast Asia (refer to Figure 6-1). The foundation of Buddhism is represented by these concepts, known as the Four Noble Truths:

1. All living beings must endure suffering.
2. Suffering, which is caused by a desire to live, leads to reincarnation (repeated rebirth in new bodies or forms of life).
3. The goal of all existence is to escape from 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, which includes rightness of belief, resolve, speech, action, livelihood, effort, thought, and meditation.

Like the other two universalizing religions, Buddhism split into more than one branch, as followers disagreed on interpreting statements by the founder, Siddhartha Gautama. The three main branches are Mahayana, Theravada, and Tantrayana. Mahayanists account for about 56 percent of Buddhists, primarily in China, Japan, and Korea. Theravadists comprise about 38 percent of





A 34-meter (110-foot) statue of Buddha seated on a lotus flower stands at Po Lin Monastery on Hong Kong's Lantau Island, in China.

Buddhists, especially in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. The remaining 6 percent are Tantrayanists, found primarily in Tibet and Mongolia.

An accurate count of Buddhists is especially difficult, because only a few people participate in Buddhist institutions. Religious functions are performed primarily by monks rather than by the general public. Also, the number of Buddhists is difficult to count because Buddhism, although a universalizing religion, differs in significant respects from the Western concept of a formal religious system. Someone can be both a Buddhist and a believer in other Eastern religions, whereas Christianity and Islam both require exclusive adherence. Most Buddhists in China and Japan, in particular, believe at the same time in an ethnic religion.

### Other Universalizing Religions

Sikhism and Bahá'í are the two universalizing religions other than Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism with the largest numbers of adherents. There are an estimated 25 million Sikhs and 8 million Bahá'ís. All but 3 million Sikhs are clustered in the Punjab region of India, whereas Bahá'ís are dispersed among many countries, primarily in Africa and Asia.

Sikhism's first guru (religious teacher or enlightener) was Nanak (1469–1538), who lived in a village near the city of Lahore, in present-day Pakistan. God was revealed to Guru Nanak as The

One Supreme Being, or Creator, who rules the universe by divine will. Only God is perfect, but people have the capacity for continual improvement and movement toward perfection by taking individual responsibility for their deeds and actions on Earth, such as heartfelt adoration, devotion, and surrender to the one God.

Sikhism's most important ceremony, introduced by the tenth guru, Gobind Singh (1666–1708), is the Amrit (or Baptism), in which Sikhs declare they will uphold the principles of the faith. Gobind Singh also introduced the practice of men wearing turbans on their heads and never cutting their beards or hair. Wearing a uniform gave Sikhs a disciplined outlook and a sense of unity of purpose.

The Bahá'í religion is even more recent than Sikhism. It grew out of the Bábi faith, which was founded in Shíráz, Iran, in 1844 by Siyyid 'Ali Muhammad, known as the *Báb* (Persian for "gateway"). Bahá'ís believe that one of the Báb's disciples Husayn 'Ali Nuri, known as *Bahá'u'lláh* (Arabic for "Glory of God"), was the prophet and messenger of God. Bahá'u'lláh's function was to overcome the disunity of religions and establish a universal faith through abolition of racial, class, and religious prejudices.

## Ethnic Religions

The ethnic religion with by far the largest number of followers is Hinduism. With 860 million adherents, Hinduism is the world's third-largest religion, behind Christianity and Islam. Ethnic religions in Asia and Africa comprise most of the remainder.

### Hinduism

Ethnic religions typically have much more clustered distributions than do universalizing religions. Although Hinduism is the world's third-largest religion, 97 percent of Hindus are concentrated in one country, India, and most of the remainder can be found in India's neighbor Nepal. Hindus comprise more than 80 percent of the population of these two countries, and a small minority in every other country.

Rigid approach to theological matters is not central to Hinduism. Hindus believe that it is up to the individual to decide the best way to worship God. Various paths to reach God include the path of knowledge, the path of renunciation, the path of devotion, and the path of action. You can pursue your own path and follow your own convictions, as long as they are in harmony with your true nature. You are responsible for your own actions and you alone suffer the consequences.

Because people start from different backgrounds and experiences, the appropriate form of worship for any two individuals may not be the same. Hinduism does not have a central authority or a single holy book, so each individual selects suitable rituals. If one person practices Hinduism in a particular way, other Hindus will not think that the individual has made a mistake or strayed from orthodox doctrine.

The average Hindu has allegiance to a particular god or concept within a broad range of possibilities. The manifestation of God with the largest number of adherents—an estimated 68 percent—is Vaishnavism, which worships the god Vishnu, a loving god incarnated as Krishna. An estimated 27 percent adhere to Sivaism, dedicated to Siva, a protective and destructive

god. Shaktism is a form of worship dedicated to the female consorts of Vishnu and Siva. Although these and other deities and approaches are supported throughout India, some geographic concentration exists: Siva and Shakti are concentrated in the north; Shakti and Vishnu in the east; Vishnu in the west; and Siva, along with some Vishnu, in the south. However, holy places for Siva and Vishnu are dispersed throughout India.

## Other Ethnic Religions

Several hundred million people practice ethnic religions in East Asia, especially in China and Japan. The coexistence of Buddhism with these ethnic religions in East Asia differs from the Western concept of exclusive religious belief. Confucianism and Daoism (sometimes spelled Taoism) are often distinguished as separate ethnic religions in China, but many Chinese consider themselves both Buddhists and either Confucian, Daoist, or some other Chinese ethnic religion.

Buddhism does not compete for adherents with Confucianism, Daoism, and other ethnic religions in China, because many Chinese accept the teachings of both universalizing and ethnic religions. Such commingling of diverse philosophies is not totally foreign to Americans. The tenets of Christianity or Judaism, the wisdom of the ancient Greek philosophers, and the ideals of the Declaration of Independence can all be held dear without doing grave injustice to the others.

**CONFUCIANISM.** Confucius (551–479 B.C.) was a philosopher and teacher in the Chinese province of Lu. His sayings, which were recorded by his students, emphasized the importance of the ancient Chinese tradition of *li*, which can be translated roughly as “propriety” or “correct behavior.” Confucianism is an ethnic religion because of its especially strong rooting in traditional values of special importance to Chinese people.

Confucianism prescribed a series of ethical principles for the orderly conduct of daily life in China, such as following traditions, fulfilling obligations, and treating others with sympathy and respect. These rules applied to China’s rulers, as well as to their subjects.

**DAOISM (TAOISM).** Lao-Zi (604–531? B.C., also spelled Lao Tse), a contemporary of Confucius, organized Daoism. Although a government administrator by profession, Lao-Zi’s writings emphasized the mystical and magical aspects of life rather than the importance of public service, which Confucius had emphasized.

Daoists seek *dao* (or *tao*), which means the “way” or “path.” A virtuous person draws power (*de* or *te*) from being absorbed in *dao*. *Dao* cannot be comprehended by reason and knowledge, because not everything is knowable. Because the universe is not ultimately subject to rational analysis, myths and legends develop to explain events. Only by avoidance of daily activities and introspection can a person live in harmony with the principles that underlie and govern the universe.

Daoism split into many sects, some acting like secret societies, and followers embraced elements of magic. The religion was officially banned by the Communists after they took control of China in 1949, but it is still practiced in China, and it is legal in Taiwan.

**SHINTOISM.** Since ancient times, Shintoism has been the distinctive ethnic religion of Japan. Ancient Shintoists considered forces of nature to be divine, especially the Sun and Moon, as well as rivers, trees, rocks, mountains, and certain animals. The religion was transmitted from one generation to the next orally until the fifth century A.D., when the introduction of Chinese writing facilitated the recording of ancient rituals and prayers. Gradually, deceased emperors and other ancestors became more important deities for Shintoists than natural features.

Under the reign of the Emperor Meiji (1868–1912), Shintoism became the official state religion, and the emperor was regarded as divine. Shintoism therefore was as much a political cult as a religion, and in a cultural sense all Japanese were Shintoists. After defeating Japan in World War II, the victorious Allies ordered Emperor Hirohito to renounce his divinity in a speech to the Japanese people, although he was allowed to retain ceremonial powers.

Shintoism still thrives in Japan, although no longer as the official state religion. Prayers are recited to show reverence for ancestors, and pilgrimages are made to shrines believed to house deities. More than 80,000 shrines serve as places for neighbors to meet or for children to play.

**JUDAISM.** About 6 million Jews live in the United States, 5 million in Israel, 2 million in Europe, and 1 million each in Asia and Latin America. Within the United States, Jews are heavily concentrated in the large cities, including one-fourth in the New York area alone. Jews constitute a majority in Israel, where for the first time since the biblical era an independent state has had a Jewish majority.

Judaism plays a more substantial role in Western civilization than its number of adherents would suggest, because two of the three main universalizing religions—Christianity and Islam—find some of their roots in Judaism. Jesus was born a Jew, and Muhammad traced his ancestry to Abraham.

Judaism is an ethnic religion based in the lands bordering the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, called Canaan in the Bible, Palestine by the Romans, and the state of Israel since 1948. About 4,000 years ago Abraham, considered the patriarch or father of Judaism, migrated from present-day Iraq to Canaan, along a route known as the Fertile Crescent (see discussion of the Fertile Crescent in Chapter 8 and Figure 8–3). The Bible recounts the ancient history of the Jewish people.

Fundamental to Judaism was belief in one all-powerful God. It was the first recorded religion to espouse **monotheism**, belief that there is only one God. Judaism offered a sharp contrast to the **polytheism** practiced by neighboring people, who worshipped a collection of gods. Jews considered themselves the “chosen” people, because God had selected them to live according to His ethical and moral principles, such as the Ten Commandments.

The name *Judaism* derives from *Judah*, one of the patriarch Jacob’s 12 sons; *Israel* is another biblical name for Jacob. Descendants of ten of Jacob’s sons, plus two of his grandsons, constituted the 12 tribes of Hebrews who emigrated from Egypt in the Exodus narrative. Each received a portion of Canaan. Judah is one of the surviving tribes of Hebrews; ten of the tribes were considered lost after they were conquered and forced to migrate to Assyria in 721 B.C.

**ETHNIC AFRICAN RELIGIONS.** Approximately 100 million Africans, 12 percent of the population, follow traditional ethnic religions, sometimes called **animism**. Animists believe that such inanimate objects as plants and stones, or such natural events as thunderstorms and earthquakes, are “animated,” or have discrete spirits and conscious life. Relatively little is known about African religions because few holy books or other written documents have come down from ancestors. Religious rituals are passed from one generation to the next by word of mouth.

African animist religions are apparently based on monotheistic concepts, although below the supreme god there is a hierarchy of divinities. These divinities may be assistants to the supreme god or personifications of natural phenomena, such as trees or rivers.

As recently as 1980, some 200 million Africans—half the population of the region at the time—were classified as animists. Some atlases and textbooks persist in classifying Africa as predominantly animist, even though the actual percentage is small and declining. Followers of traditional African religions now constitute a clear majority of the population in Botswana and half of the population in Angola, Benin, Congo Republic, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mozambique, Togo, and Zimbabwe.

The rapid decline in animists in Africa has been caused by increases in the numbers of Christians and Muslims. Africa is now 46 percent Christian—split about evenly among Roman Catholic, Protestant, and other—and another 40 percent are Muslims. The growth in the two universalizing religions at the expense of ethnic religions reflects fundamental geographical differences between the two types of religions, discussed in the next key issue.

## KEY ISSUE 2

### Why Do Religions Have Different Distributions?

- Origin of religions
- Diffusion of religions
- Holy places
- The calendar

We can identify several major geographical differences between universalizing and ethnic religions. These differences include the locations where the religions originated, the processes by which they diffused from their place of origin to other regions, the types of places that are considered holy, the calendar dates identified as important holidays, and attitudes toward modifying the physical environment.

## Origin of Religions

Universalizing religions have precise places of origin, based on events in the life of a man. Ethnic religions have unknown or unclear origins, not tied to single historical individuals.

## Origin of Universalizing Religions

Each of the three universalizing religions can be traced to the actions and teachings of a man who lived since the start of recorded history. The beginnings of Buddhism go back about 2,500 years, Christianity 2,000 years, and Islam 1,500 years. Specific events also led to the division of the universalizing religions into branches.

**ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY.** Christianity was founded upon the teachings of Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem between 8 and 4 B.C. and died on a cross in Jerusalem about A.D. 30. Raised as a Jew, Jesus gathered a small band of disciples and preached the coming of the Kingdom of God. The four Gospels of the Christian Bible—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—documented miracles and extraordinary deeds that Jesus performed. He was referred to as *Christ*, from the Greek word for the Hebrew word *messiah*, which means “anointed.”

In the third year of his mission, he was betrayed to the authorities by one of his companions, Judas Iscariot. After sharing the Last Supper (the Jewish Passover seder) with his disciples in Jerusalem, Jesus was arrested and put to death 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 that his Resurrection from the dead provides people with hope for salvation.

Roman Catholics accept the teachings of the Bible, as well as the interpretation of those teachings by the Church hierarchy, headed by the Pope. According to Roman Catholic belief, God conveys His grace directly to humanity through seven sacraments, including Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, Anointing the sick, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and the Eucharist (the partaking of bread and wine that repeats the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper). Roman Catholics believe that the Eucharist literally and miraculously become the body and blood of Jesus while keeping only the appearances of bread and wine, an act known as transubstantiation.

Eastern Orthodoxy comprises the faith and practices of a collection of churches that arose in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. The split between the Roman and Eastern churches dates to the fifth century, as a result of rivalry between the Pope of Rome and the Patriarchy of Constantinople, which was especially intense after the collapse of the Roman Empire. The split between the two churches became final in 1054, when Pope Leo IX condemned the Patriarch of Constantinople. Eastern Orthodox Christians accepted the seven sacraments but rejected doctrines that the Roman Catholic Church had added since the eighth century.

Protestantism originated with the principles of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. The Reformation movement is regarded as beginning when Martin Luther posted 95 theses on the door of the church at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. According to Luther, individuals had 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.** Islam traces its origin to the same narrative as Judaism and Christianity. All three religions consider Adam to have been the first man and Abraham to have been one of his descendants. According to legend, Abraham married

Sarah, who did not bear children. As polygamy was a custom of the culture, Abraham then married Hagar, who bore a son, Ishmael. However, Sarah's fortunes changed, and she bore a son, Isaac. Sarah then successfully prevailed upon Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael.

Jews and Christians trace their story through Abraham's original wife Sarah and her son Isaac. Muslims trace their story through his second wife Hagar and her son Ishmael. After their banishment, Ishmael and Hagar wandered through the Arabian desert, eventually reaching Makkah (spelled Mecca on many English-language maps), in present-day Saudi Arabia. Centuries later one of Ishmael's descendants, Muhammad, became the Prophet of Islam.

Muhammad was born in Makkah about 570. At age 40, while engaged in a meditative retreat, Muhammad received his first revelation from God through the Angel Gabriel. The Quran, the holiest book in Islam, is a record of God's words, as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through Gabriel. Arabic is the lingua franca, or language of communication, within the Muslim world, because it is the language in which the Quran is written.

As he began to preach the truth that God had revealed to him, Muhammad suffered persecution, and in 622 he was commanded by God to emigrate. His migration from Makkah to the city of Yathrib—an event known as the *Hijra* (from the Arabic word for "migration," sometimes spelled *hegira*)—marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. Yathrib was subsequently renamed Madina, Arabic for "the City of the Prophet." After several years Muhammad and his followers returned to Makkah and established Islam as the city's religion. By Muhammad's death, in 632 at about age 63, Islam had diffused to most of present-day Saudi Arabia.

Differences between the two main branches—Shiites and Sunnis—go back to the earliest days of Islam and basically reflect disagreement over the line of succession in Islamic leadership. Muhammad had no surviving son and no follower of comparable leadership ability. His successor was Abu Bakr (573–634), an early supporter from Makkah, who became known as *caliph* ("successor of the prophet"). The next two caliphs, Umar (634–644) and Uthman (644–656), expanded the territory under Muslim influence to Egypt and Persia.

Uthman was a member of a powerful Makkah clan that had initially opposed Muhammad before the clan's conversion to Islam. More zealous Muslims criticized Uthman for seeking compromises with other formerly pagan families in Makkah. Uthman's opponents found a leader in Ali (600?–661), a cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, and thus Muhammad's nearest male heir. When Uthman was murdered, in 656, Ali became caliph, although 5 years later he, too, was assassinated.

Ali's descendants claim leadership of Islam, and Shiites support this claim. But Shiites disagree among themselves about the precise line of succession from Ali to modern times. They acknowledge that the chain of leadership was broken, but they dispute the date and events surrounding the disruption. During the 1970s both the shah (king) of Iran and an ayatollah (religious scholar) named Khomeini claimed to be the divinely appointed interpreter of Islam for the Shiites. The allegiance of the Iranian Shiites switched from the shah to the ayatollah largely because the ayatollah made a more convincing case that he was more faithfully adhering to the rigid laws laid down by Muhammad in the Quran.

**ORIGIN OF BUDDHISM.** The founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama, was born about 563 B.C. in Lumbini, in present-day Nepal, near the border with India, about 160 kilometers (100 miles) from Vārānasi (Benares). The son of a lord, he led a privileged existence sheltered from life's hardships. Gautama had a beautiful wife, palaces, and servants.

According to Buddhist legend, Gautama's life changed after a series of four trips. He encountered a decrepit old man on the first trip, a disease-ridden man on the second trip, and a corpse on the third trip. After witnessing these scenes of pain and suffering, Gautama began to feel he could no longer enjoy his life of comfort and security. Then, on a fourth trip, Gautama 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, thinking and experimenting with forms of meditation. Gautama emerged as the *Buddha*, the "awakened or enlightened one," and spent 45 years preaching his views across India. In the process, he trained monks, established orders, and preached to the public.

Theravada is the older of the two largest branches of Buddhism. The word means "the way of the elders," indicating the Theravada Buddhists' belief that they are closer to Buddha's original approach. Theravadists believe that Buddhism is a full-time occupation, so to become a good Buddhist, one must renounce worldly goods and become a monk.

Mahayana split from Theravada Buddhism about 2,000 years ago. *Mahayana* is translated as "the bigger ferry" or "raft," and Mahayanists call Theravada Buddhism by the name *Himayana*, or "the little raft." Mahayanists claim that their approach to Buddhism can help more people because it is less demanding and all-encompassing. Whereas the Theravadists emphasize Buddha's life of self-help and years of solitary introspection, Mahayanists emphasize Buddha's later years of teaching and helping others. The Theravadists cite Buddha's wisdom, the Mahayanists his compassion.

**ORIGIN OF OTHER UNIVERSALIZING RELIGIONS.** Sikhism and Bahá'í were founded more recently than the three large universalizing religions. The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, traveled widely through South Asia around 500 years ago preaching his new faith, and many people became his *Sikhs*, which is the Hindi word for *disciples*. Nine other gurus succeeded Guru Nanak. Arjan, the fifth guru, compiled and edited in 1604 the *Guru Granth Sahib* (the Holy Granth of Enlightenment), which became the book of Sikh holy scriptures.

When it was established in Iran during the nineteenth century, Bahá'í provoked strong opposition from Shiite Muslims. The Báb was executed in 1850, as were 20,000 of his followers. Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet of Bahá'í, was also arrested, but was released in 1853 and exiled to Baghdad. In 1863 his claim that he was the messenger of God anticipated by the Báb was accepted by other followers. Before he died in 1892, Bahá'u'lláh appointed his eldest son 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921) to be the leader of the Bahá'í community and the authorized interpreter of his teachings.

## Origin of Hinduism, an Ethnic Religion

Unlike the three universalizing religions, Hinduism did not originate with a specific founder. The word *Hinduism* originated in the

sixth century B.C. to refer to people living in what is now India. Whereas the origins of Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism are recorded in the relatively recent past, Hinduism existed prior to recorded history. The earliest surviving Hindu documents were written around 1500 B.C., although archaeological explorations have unearthed objects relating to the religion from 2500 B.C. Aryan tribes from Central Asia invaded India about 1400 B.C. and brought with them Indo-European languages, as discussed in Chapter 5. In addition to their language, the Aryans brought their religion.

The Aryans first settled in the area now called the Punjab in northwestern India and later migrated east to the Ganges River valley, as far as Bengal. Centuries of intermingling with the Dravidians already living in the area modified their religious beliefs.

## Diffusion of Religions

The three universalizing religions diffused from specific hearths, or places of origin, to other regions of the world. In contrast, ethnic religions typically remain clustered in one location.

### Diffusion of Universalizing Religions

The hearths where each of the three largest universalizing religions originated are based on the events in the lives of the three key individuals (Figure 6-4). All three hearths are in Asia (Christianity and Islam in Southwest Asia, Buddhism in South Asia). Followers transmitted the messages preached in the hearths to people elsewhere, diffusing them across Earth's surface along distinctive paths, as shown in Figure 6-4. Today these three universalizing religions together have several billion adherents distributed across wide areas of the world.

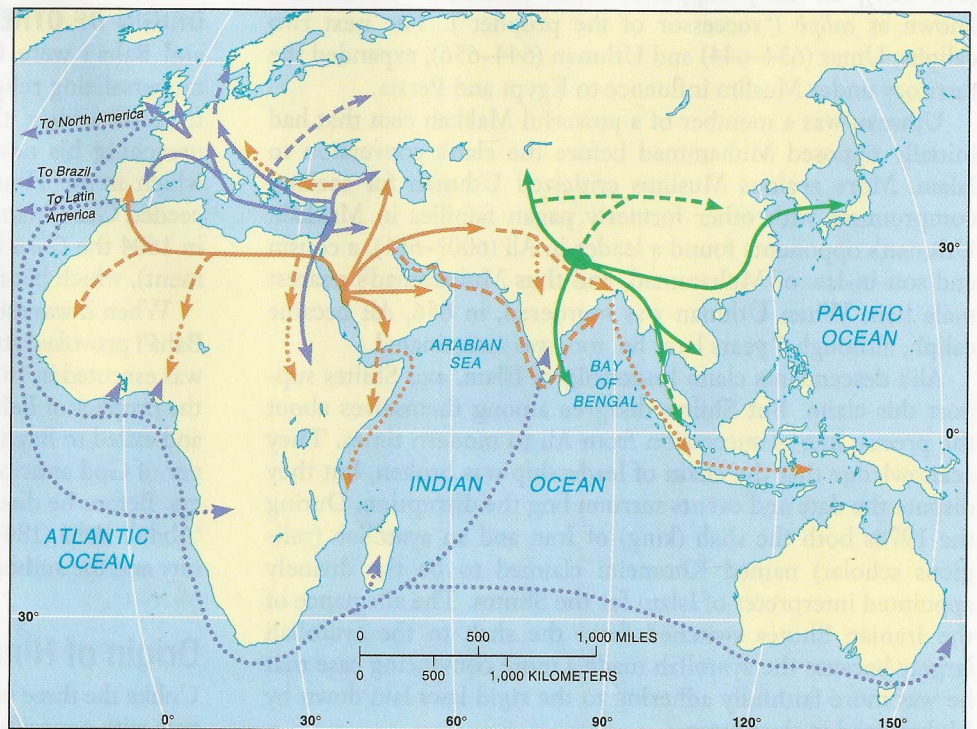
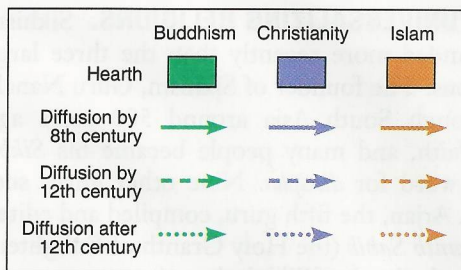
**DIFFUSION OF CHRISTIANITY.** Christianity's diffusion has been rather clearly recorded since Jesus first set forth its tenets in the Roman province of Palestine. Consequently, geographers can examine its diffusion by reconstructing patterns of communications, interaction, and migration.

In Chapter 1 two processes of diffusion were identified—relocation (diffusion through migration) and expansion (diffusion through a snowballing effect). Within expansion diffusion we distinguished between hierarchical (diffusion through key leaders) and contagious (widespread diffusion). Christianity diffused through a combination of all of these forms of diffusion.

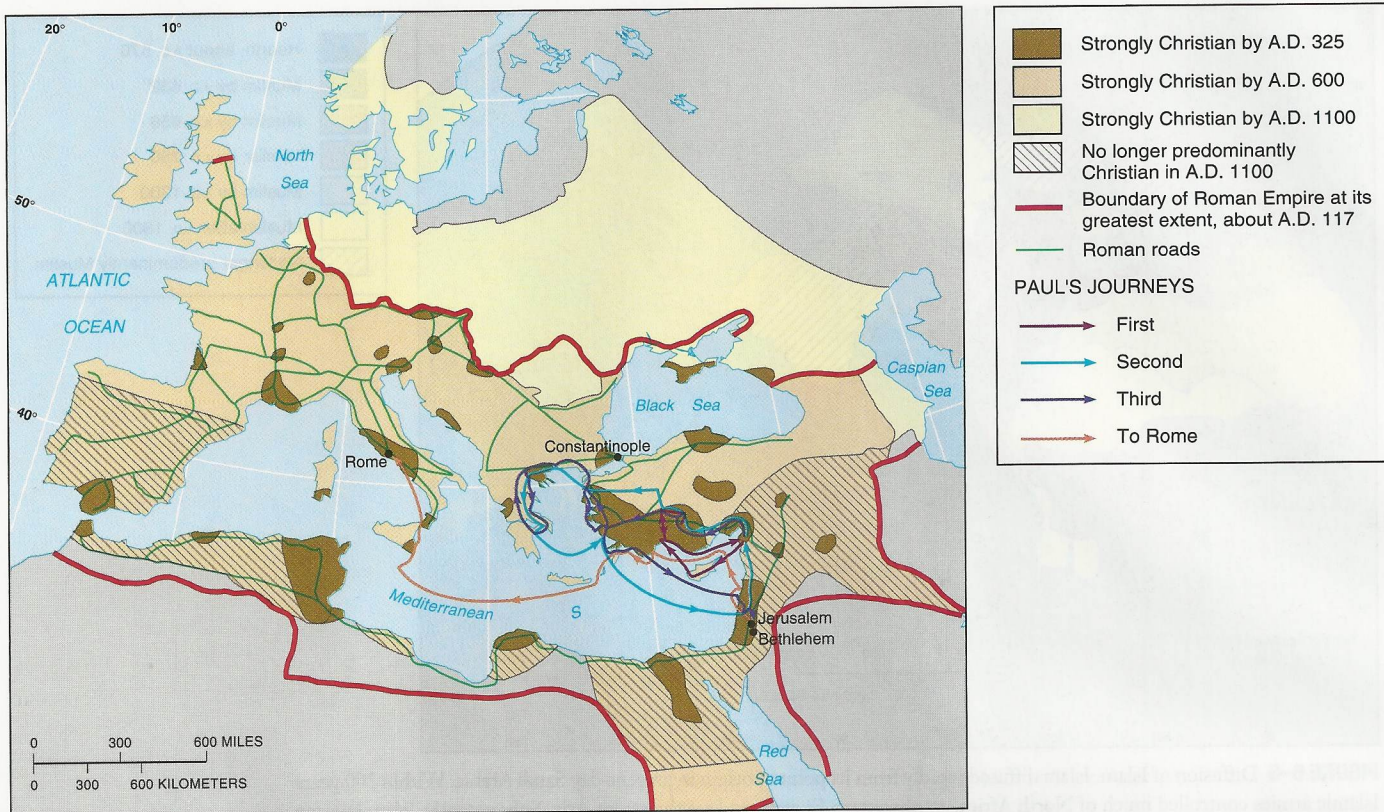
Christianity first diffused from its hearth in Palestine through relocation diffusion. **Missionaries**—individuals who help to transmit a universalizing religion through relocation diffusion—carried the teachings of Jesus along the Roman Empire's protected sea routes and excellent road network to people in other locations. Paul of Tarsus, a disciple of Jesus, traveled especially extensively through the Roman Empire as a missionary. The outline of the empire and spread of Christianity are shown in Figure 6-5.

People in commercial towns and military settlements that were directly linked by the communications network received the message first from Paul and other missionaries. But Christianity spread widely within the Roman Empire through contagious diffusion—daily contact between believers in the towns and nonbelievers in the surrounding countryside. **Pagan**, the word for a follower of a polytheistic religion in ancient times, derives from the Latin word for "countryside."

The dominance of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire was assured during the fourth century through hierarchical diffusion—acceptance of the religion by the empire's key elite figure, the emperor. Emperor Constantine encouraged the spread of Christianity by embracing it in 313, and Emperor Theodosius proclaimed it the empire's official religion in 380.



**FIGURE 6-4** Diffusion of universalizing religions. Buddhism's hearth is in present-day Nepal and northern India, Christianity's in present-day Israel, and Islam's in present-day Saudi Arabia. Buddhism diffused primarily east toward East and Southeast Asia, Christianity west toward Europe, and Islam west toward northern Africa and east toward southwestern Asia.



**FIGURE 6-5** Diffusion of Christianity. Christianity began to diffuse from Palestine through Europe during the time of the Roman Empire and continued after the empire's collapse. Muslims controlled portions of the Iberian Peninsula (Spain) for more than 700 years, until 1492. Much of southwestern Asia was predominantly Christian at one time, but today it is predominantly Muslim.

In subsequent centuries Christianity further diffused into Eastern Europe through conversion of kings or other elite figures.

Migration and missionary activity by Europeans since the year 1500 has extended Christianity to other regions of the world, as shown in Figure 6-1. Through permanent resettlement of Europeans, Christianity became the dominant religion in North and South America, Australia, and New Zealand. Christianity's dominance was further achieved by conversion of indigenous populations and by intermarriage. In recent decades Christianity has further diffused to Africa, where it is now the most widely practiced religion.

Latin Americans are predominantly Roman Catholic because their territory was colonized by the Spanish and Portuguese, who brought with them to the Western Hemisphere their religion as well as their languages. Canada (except Québec) and the United States have Protestant majorities because their early colonists came primarily from Protestant England.

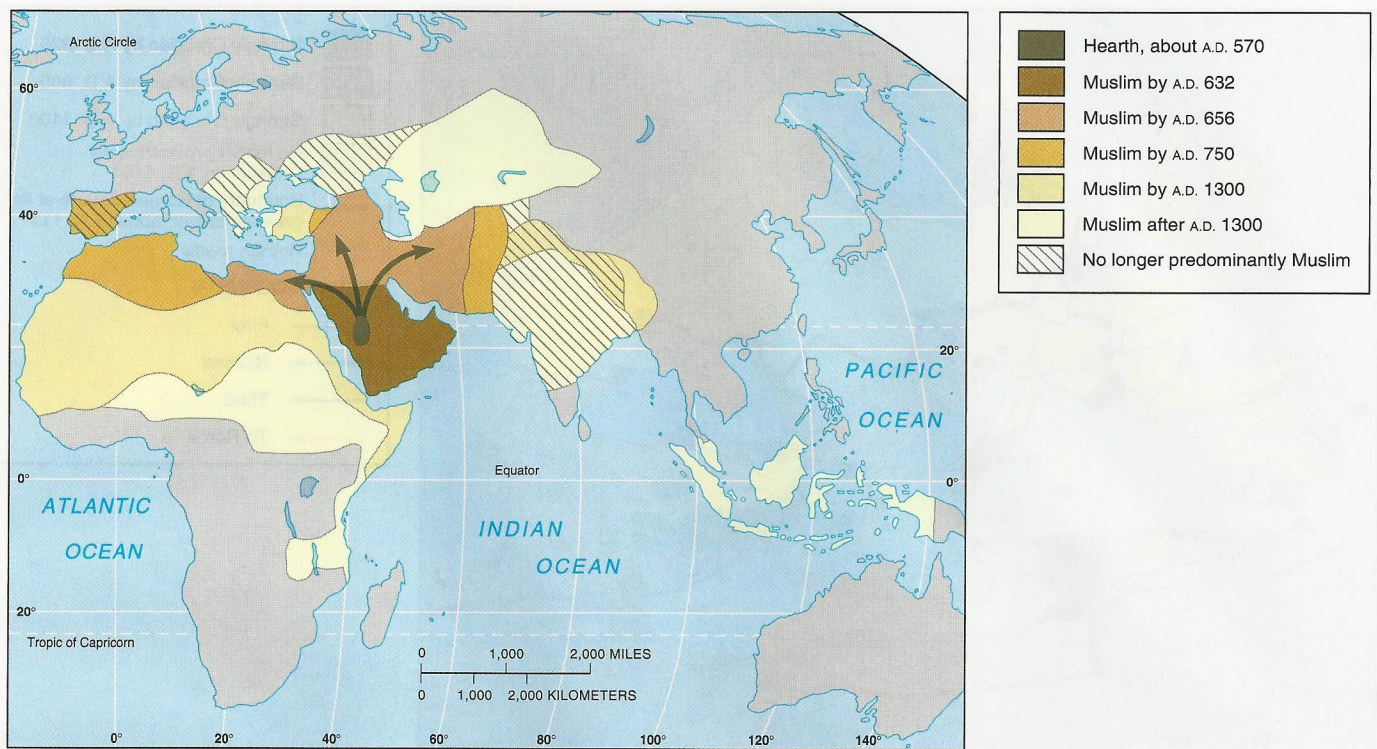
Some regions and localities within the United States and Canada are predominantly Roman Catholic because of immigration from Roman Catholic countries (refer to Figure 6-3). New England and large midwestern cities such as Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, and Milwaukee have concentrations of Roman Catholics because of immigration from Ireland, Italy, and Eastern Europe, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Immigration from Mexico and other Latin American countries has concentrated Roman Catholics in the Southwest, whereas French settlement from the seventeenth

century, as well as recent immigration, has produced a predominantly Roman Catholic Québec.

Similarly, geographers trace the distribution of other Christian denominations within the United States to the fact that migrants came from different parts of Europe, especially during the nineteenth century. Followers of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, popularly known as Mormons, settled at Fayette, New York, but after the death of their founder, Joseph Smith, the group moved several times in search of religious freedom. Eventually, under the leadership of Brigham Young, they migrated to the sparsely inhabited Salt Lake Valley in the present-day state of Utah.

**DIFFUSION OF ISLAM.** Muhammad's successors organized followers into armies that extended the region of Muslim control over an extensive area of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Within a century of Muhammad's death, Muslim armies conquered Palestine, the Persian Empire, and much of India, resulting in the conversion of many non-Arabs to Islam, often through intermarriage. To the west, Muslims captured North Africa, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, and retained part of Western Europe, particularly much of present-day Spain, until 1492 (Figure 6-6). During the same century during which the Christians regained all of Western Europe, Muslims took control of much of southeastern Europe and Turkey.

As was the case with Christianity, Islam, as a universalizing religion, diffused well beyond its hearth in Southwest Asia through



**FIGURE 6-6** Diffusion of Islam. Islam diffused rapidly from its point of origin in present-day Saudi Arabia. Within 200 years Islamic armies controlled much of North Africa, southwestern Europe, and southwestern Asia. Subsequently, Islam became the predominant religion as far east as Indonesia.

relocation diffusion of missionaries to portions of sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. Although it is spatially isolated from the Islamic core region in Southwest Asia, Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous country, is predominantly Muslim, because Arab traders brought the religion there in the thirteenth century.

**DIFFUSION OF BUDDHISM.** Buddhism did not diffuse rapidly from its point of origin in northeastern India. Most responsible for the spread of Buddhism was Asoka, emperor of the Magadhan Empire from about 273 to 232 B.C. The Magadhan Empire formed the nucleus of several powerful kingdoms in South Asia between the sixth century B.C. and the eighth century A.D. About 257 B.C., at the height of the Magadhan Empire's power, Asoka became a Buddhist and thereafter attempted to put into practice Buddha's social principles.

A council organized by Asoka at Pataliputra decided to send missionaries to territories neighboring the Magadhan Empire. Emperor Asoka's son, Mahinda, led a mission to the island of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), where the king and his subjects were converted to Buddhism. As a result, Sri Lanka is the country that claims the longest continuous tradition of practicing Buddhism. Missionaries were also sent in the third century B.C. to Kashmir, the Himalayas, Burma (Myanmar), and elsewhere in India.

In the first century A.D., merchants along the trading routes from northeastern India introduced Buddhism to China. Many Chinese were receptive to the ideas brought by Buddhist missionaries, and Buddhist texts were translated into Chinese languages. Chinese rulers allowed their people to become Buddhist monks during the fourth century A.D., and in the following centuries Buddhism turned into a genuinely Chinese religion. Buddhism

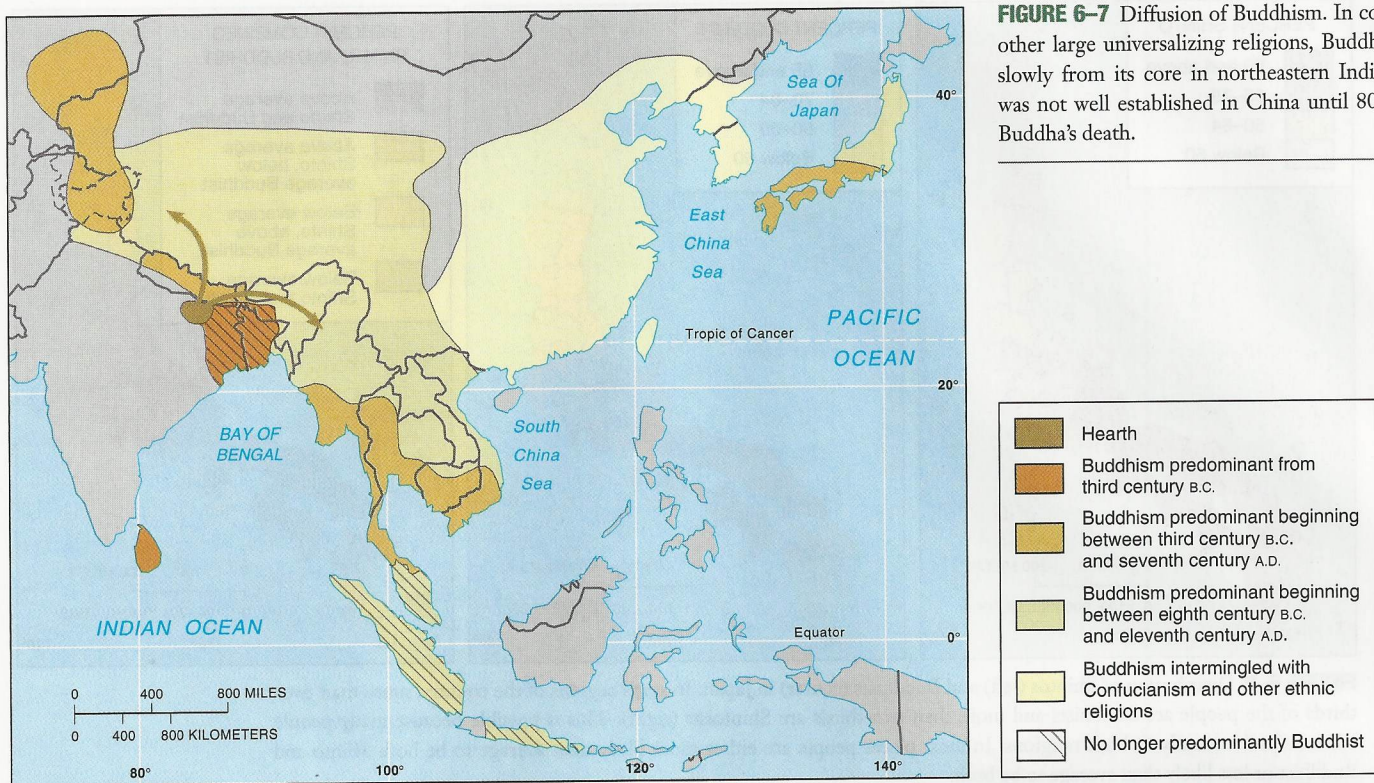
further diffused from China to Korea in the fourth century and from Korea to Japan two centuries later. During the same era, Buddhism lost its original base of support in India (Figure 6-7).

**DIFFUSION OF OTHER UNIVERSALIZING RELIGIONS.** The Bahá'í religion diffused to other regions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, under the leadership of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, son of the prophet Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'í also spread rapidly during the late twentieth century, when a temple was constructed on every continent.

Sikhism remained relatively clustered in the Punjab, where the religion originated. Sikhs fought with the Muslims to gain control of the Punjab region, and they achieved their ambition in 1802 when they created an independent state in the Punjab. The British took over the Punjab in 1849 as part of its India colony but granted the Sikhs a privileged position and let them fight in the British army. When the British government created the independent states of India and Pakistan in 1947, it divided the Punjab between the two instead of giving the Sikhs a separate country. Preferring to live in Hindu-dominated India rather than Muslim-dominated Pakistan, 2.5 million Sikhs moved from Pakistan's West Punjab region to East Punjab in India.

### Lack of Diffusion of Ethnic Religions

Most ethnic religions have limited, if any, diffusion. These religions lack missionaries who are devoted to converting people from other religions. Thus, the diffusion of universalizing religions, especially Christianity and Islam, typically comes at the expense of ethnic religions.



**FIGURE 6-7** Diffusion of Buddhism. In contrast to the other large universalizing religions, Buddhism diffused slowly from its core in northeastern India. Buddhism was not well established in China until 800 years after Buddha's death.

### MINGLING OF ETHNIC AND UNIVERSALIZING RELIGIONS.

Universalizing religions may supplant ethnic religions or mingle with them. In some African countries Christian practices are similar to those in their former European colonial masters. Equatorial Guinea, a former Spanish colony, is mostly Roman Catholic, whereas Namibia, a former German colony, is heavily Lutheran.

Elsewhere, traditional African religious ideas and practices have been merged with Christianity. For example, African rituals may give relative prominence to the worship of ancestors. Anglican bishops have decided that an African man who has more than one wife can become a Christian, as long as he does not add to the number of wives by further marriages. Desire for a merger of traditional practices with Christianity has led to the formation of several thousand churches in Africa not affiliated with established churches elsewhere in the world.

In East Asia, Buddhism is the universalizing religion that has most mingled with ethnic religions, such as Shintoism in Japan. Shintoists first resisted Buddhism, when it first diffused to Japan from Korea in the ninth century. Later, Shintoists embraced Buddhism and amalgamated elements of the two religions. Buddhist priests took over most of the Shinto shrines, but Buddhist deities came to be regarded by the Japanese as Shintoist deities instead.

The current situation in Japan offers a strong caution to anyone attempting to document the number of adherents of any religion. Although Japan is a wealthy country with excellent record-keeping, the number of Shintos in the country is currently estimated at either 3 million or 119 million—and these extreme figures come from the same authoritative source, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica Year In Review*. More than 90 percent of Japanese say they are Shintos and 70 percent say they are Buddhists, so clearly most Japanese profess adherence to both religions. And it is impossible to gauge the strength of

adherence to the two religions. Is one Japanese more Buddhist than Shinto, whereas another is more Shinto than Buddhist?

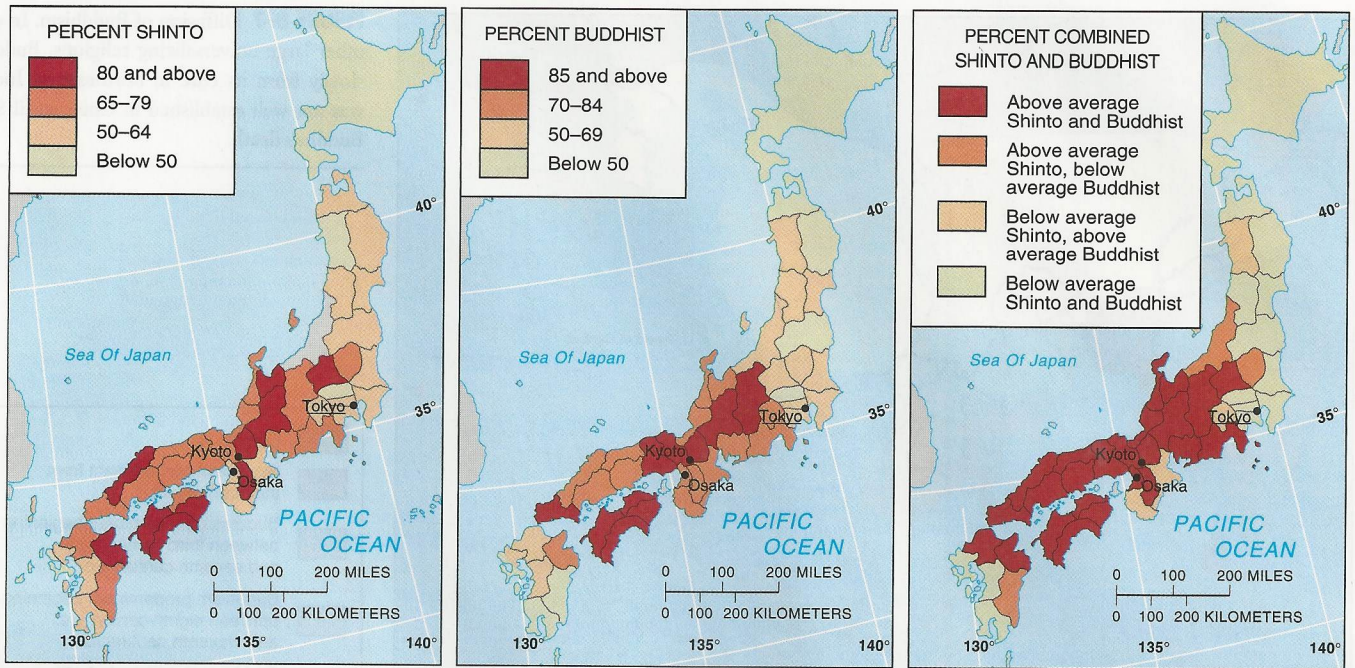
Mapping the distribution of support for Shintoism and Buddhism in Japan shows the extent of the overlap of the two religions. Nearly every locality displays either above-average support for both religions or below-average support for one of the religions and above average for the other (Figure 6-8).

Ethnic religions can diffuse if adherents migrate to new locations for economic reasons and are not forced to adopt a strongly entrenched universalizing religion. For example, the 1.2 million inhabitants of Mauritius include 52 percent Hindu, 28 percent Christian (26 percent Roman Catholic and 2 percent Anglican), and 17 percent Muslim. The religious diversity is a function of the country's history of immigration.

A 2,040-square-kilometer (788-square-mile) island located in the Indian Ocean 800 kilometers (500 miles) east of Madagascar, Mauritius was uninhabited until 1638, so it had no traditional ethnic religion. That year Dutch settlers arrived to plant sugarcane and naturally brought their religion—Christianity—with them. France gained control in 1721 and imported African slaves to work on the sugarcane plantations. Then the British took over in 1810 and brought workers from India. Mauritius became independent in 1992. Hinduism on Mauritius traces back to the Indian immigrants, Islam to the African immigrants, and Christianity to the European immigrants.

**JUDAISM, AN EXCEPTION.** The spatial distribution of Jews differs from that of other ethnic religions, because Judaism is practiced in many countries, not just its place of origin. Only since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 has a significant percentage of the world's Jews lived in their Eastern Mediterranean homeland.





**FIGURE 6-8** Distribution of Shintos (left) and Buddhists (center) in Japan. In some regions of the country, more than two-thirds of the people are Buddhists and more than two-thirds are Shintoists (right). This is possible because many people adhere simultaneously to both religions. In most places people are either more likely than average to be both Shinto and Buddhist or less likely than average to be both.

Most Jews have not lived in the Eastern Mediterranean since A.D. 70, when the Romans forced them to disperse throughout the world, an action known as the *diaspora*, from the Greek word for “dispersion.” The Romans forced the diaspora after crushing an attempt by the Jews to rebel against Roman rule.

Most Jews migrated from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe, although some went to North Africa and Asia. Having been exiled from the home of their ethnic religion, Jews lived among other nationalities, retaining separate religious practices but adopting other cultural characteristics of the host country, such as language.

Other nationalities often persecuted the Jews living in their midst. Historically, the Jews of many European countries were forced to live in **ghettos**, defined as a city neighborhood set up by law to be inhabited only by Jews. The term *ghetto* originated during the sixteenth century in Venice, Italy, as a reference to the city’s foundry or metal-casting district, where Jews were forced to live. Ghettos were frequently surrounded by walls, and the gates were locked at night to prevent escape.

Beginning in the 1930s, but especially during World War II (1939–45), the Nazis systematically rounded up a large percentage of European Jews, transported them to concentration camps, and exterminated them. About 4 million Jews died in the camps, and 2 million in other ways. Many of the survivors migrated to Israel. Today less than 15 percent of the world’s 15 million Jews live in Europe, compared to 90 percent a century ago.

## Holy Places

Religions may elevate particular places to a holy position. However, universalizing and ethnic religions differ on the types of places that are considered holy. An ethnic religion typically has a less widespread distribution than a universalizing one in

part because its holy places derive from the distinctive physical environment of its hearth, such as mountains, rivers, or rock formations. A universalizing religion endows with holiness cities and other places associated with the founder’s life. Its holy places do not necessarily have to be near each other, and they do not need to be related to any particular physical environment.

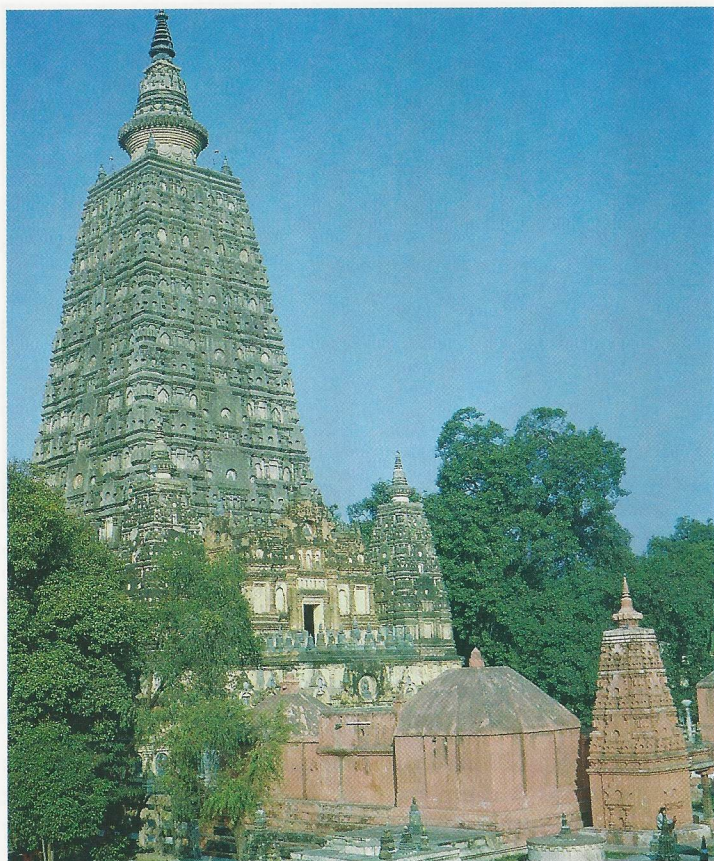
Making a **pilgrimage** to these holy places—a journey for religious purposes to a place considered sacred—is incorporated into the rituals of some universalizing and ethnic religions. Hindus and Muslims are especially encouraged to make pilgrimages to visit holy places in accordance with recommended itineraries, and Shintoists are encouraged to visit holy places in Japan.

## Holy Places in Universalizing Religions

Buddhism and Islam are the universalizing religions that place the most emphasis on identifying shrines. Places are holy because they are the locations of important events in the life of Buddha or Muhammad.

**BUDDHIST SHRINES.** Eight places are holy to Buddhists because they were the locations of important events in Buddha’s life. The four most important of the eight places are concentrated in a small area of northeastern India and southern Nepal (Figure 6-9). Most important is Lumbinī in southern Nepal, where Buddha was born, around 563 B.C. Many sanctuaries and monuments were built there, but all are in ruins today.

The second great event in Buddha’s life occurred at Bodh Gayā, 250 kilometers (150 miles) southeast of his birthplace, where Buddha reached perfect wisdom. A temple has stood near the site since the third century B.C., and part of the surrounding railing built in the first century A.D. still stands. Because Buddha reached



Mahabodhi Temple at Bodhi Gayā, India, built where Buddha found perfect wisdom.

perfect enlightenment while sitting under a bo tree, that tree has become a holy object as well. To honor Buddha, the bo tree has been diffused to other Buddhist countries, such as China and Japan.

The third important location is Deer Park in Sarnath, where Buddha gave his first sermon. The Dhamek pagoda at Sarnath, built in the third century B.C., is probably the oldest surviving

structure in India. Nearby is an important library of Buddhist literature, including many works removed from Tibet when Tibet's Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama, went into exile.

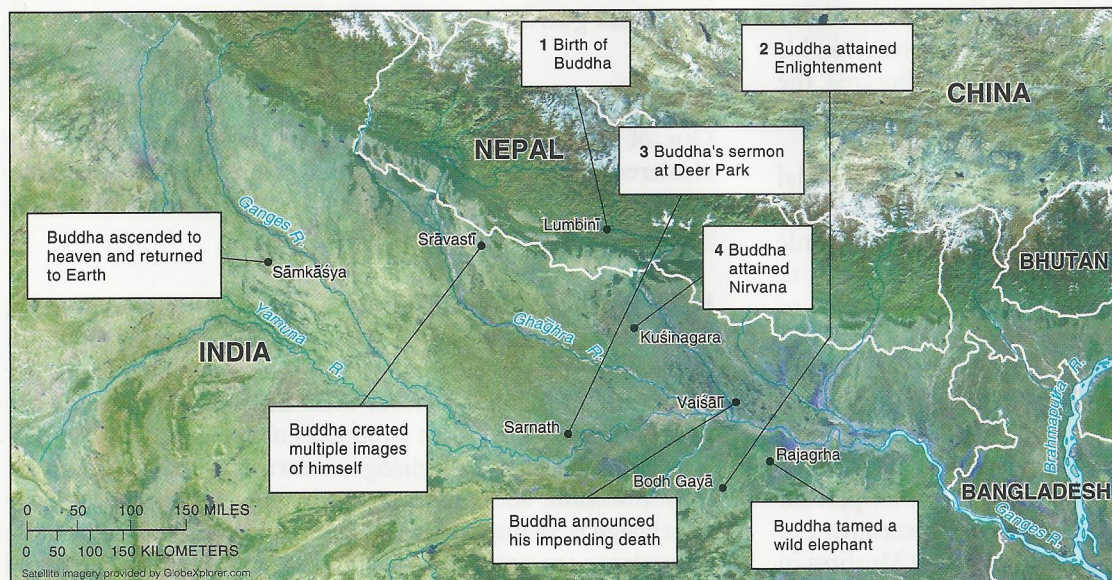
The fourth holy place is Kuśinagara, where Buddha died at age 80 and passed into nirvana, a state of peaceful extinction. Temples built at the site are currently in ruins.

Four other sites in northeastern India are particularly sacred because they were the locations of Buddha's principal miracles. At Srāvastī Buddha performed his greatest miracle. Before an assembled audience of competing religious leaders, Buddha created multiple images of himself and visited heaven. Srāvastī became an active center of Buddhism, and one of the most important monasteries was established there.

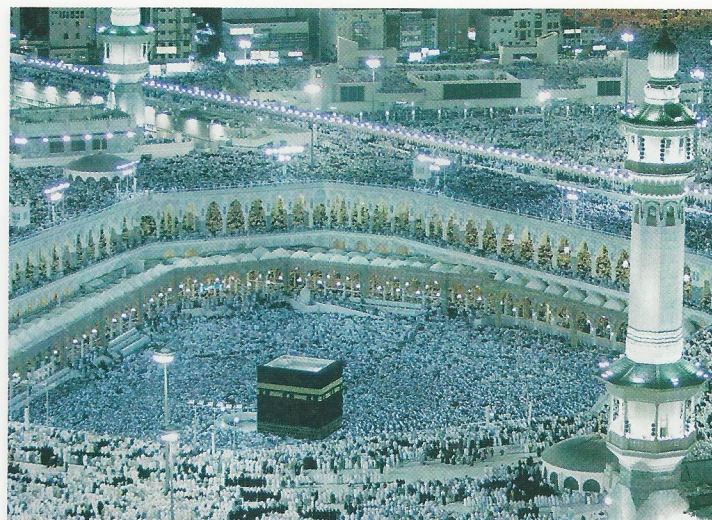
At the second miracle site, Sāmkāśya, Buddha is said to have ascended to heaven, preached to his mother, and returned to Earth. The third site, Rajagrha, is holy because Buddha tamed a wild elephant there, and shortly after Buddha's death, it became the site of the first Buddhist Council. Vaisālī, the fourth location, is the site of Buddha's announcement of his impending death and the second Buddhist Council. All four miracle sites are in ruins today, although excavation activity is under way.

**HOLY PLACES IN ISLAM.** The holiest locations in Islam are in cities associated with the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The holiest city for Muslims is Makkah (Mecca), the birthplace of Muhammad. Now a city of 1.3 million inhabitants, Makkah contains the holiest object in the Islamic landscape, al-Ka'ba, a cubelike structure encased in silk, which stands at the center of the Great Mosque, al-Haram al-Sharīf (Figure 6-10). The Ka'ba, thought to have been built by Abraham and Ishmael, contains a black stone given to Abraham by Gabriel as a sign of the covenant with Ishmael and the Muslim people.

The Ka'ba had been a religious shrine in Makkah for centuries before the origin of Islam. After Muhammad defeated the local people, he captured the Ka'ba, cleared it of idols, and rededicated it to the all-powerful Allah (God). The al-Haram mosque also



**FIGURE 6-9** Holy places in Buddhism. Most are clustered in northeastern India and southern Nepal, because they were the locations of important events in Buddha's life. Most of the sites are in ruins today.



**FIGURE 6-10** Makkah (Mecca), in Saudi Arabia, is the holiest city for Muslims, because Muhammad was born there. Thousands of Muslims make a pilgrimage to Makkah each year and gather at al-Haram al-Sharif, a mosque in the center of the city. The black, cubelike structure in the center of the mosque, called al-Ka'ba, once had been a shrine to tribal idols until Muhammad rededicated it to Allah. Muslims believe that Abraham and Ishmael originally built the Ka'ba.

contains the well of Zamzam, considered to have the same water source as that used by Ishmael and Hagar when they were wandering in the desert after their exile from Canaan.

The second most holy geographic location in Islam is Madinah (Medina), a city of 1 million inhabitants, 350 kilometers (220 miles) north of Makkah. Muhammad received his first support from the people of Madinah and became the city's chief administrator. Muhammad's tomb is at Madinah, inside Islam's second mosque.

Every healthy Muslim who has adequate financial resources is expected to undertake a pilgrimage, called a *hajj*, to Makkah (Mecca). Regardless of nationality and economic background, all pilgrims dress alike in plain white robes to emphasize common loyalty to Islam and the equality of people in the eyes of Allah. A precise set of rituals is practiced, culminating in a visit to the Ka'ba. The word *mecca* now has a general meaning in the English language as a goal sought or a center of activity.

The *hajj* attracted 1.5 million Muslims a year to Makkah from countries other than Saudi Arabia in 2006, a 50 percent increase in a decade. Hajj visas are issued by the government of Saudi Arabia according to a formula of 1 per 1,000 Muslims in a country. Roughly 40 percent each came from the Middle East and northern Africa, with the largest numbers from Nigeria, Turkey, and Yemen. Asian countries were responsible for most

of the remaining 20 percent. Although Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim country, it has not sent the largest number of pilgrims to Makkah, because of the relatively long travel distance.

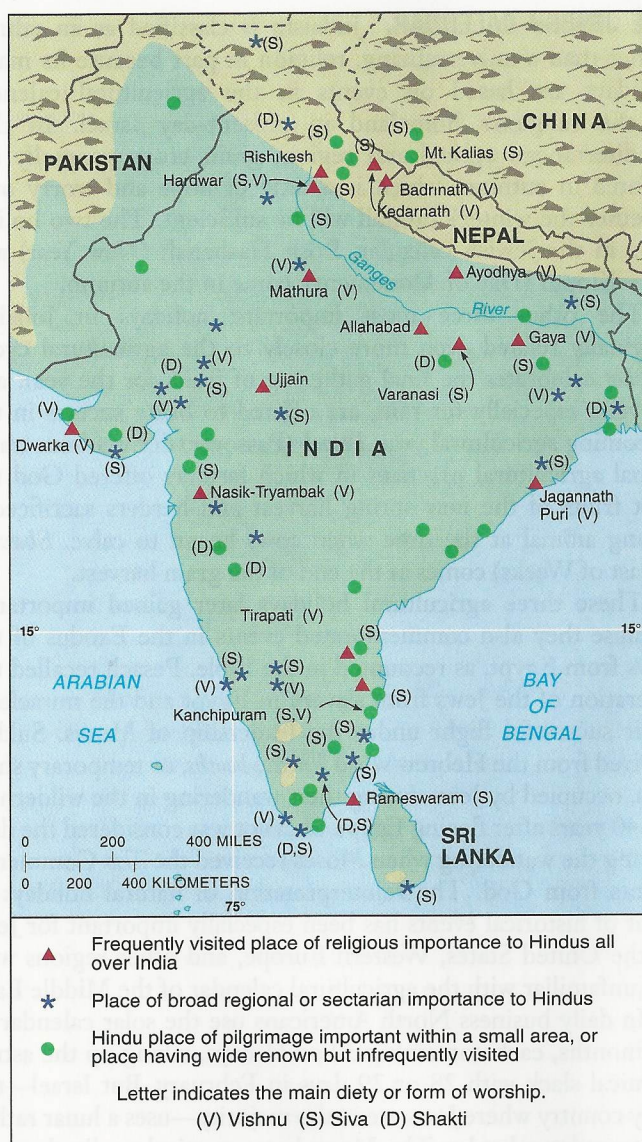
**HOLY PLACES IN SIKHISM.** Sikhism's most holy structure, the Darbar Sahib, or Golden Temple, was built at Amritsar, in the Punjab, by Arjan, the fifth guru, during the seventh century. Militant Sikhs used the Golden Temple at Amritsar as a base for launching attacks in support of greater autonomy for the Punjab during the 1980s. In 1984 the Indian army attacked the Golden Temple at Amritsar and killed approximately a thousand Sikhs defending the temple. In retaliation later that year, India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her guards, who were Sikhs.

### Holy Places in Ethnic Religions

One of the principal reasons that ethnic religions are highly clustered is that they are closely tied to the physical geography of a particular place. Pilgrimages are undertaken to view these physical features.

**HOLY PLACES IN HINDUISM.** As an ethnic religion of India, Hinduism is closely tied to the physical geography of India. According to a survey conducted by the geographer Surinder Bhardwaj, the natural features most likely to rank among the holiest shrines in India are riverbanks or coastlines.

Hindus consider a pilgrimage, known as a *tirtha*, to be an act of purification. Although not a substitute for meditation, the pilgrimage is an important act in achieving redemption. Hindu holy places are organized into a hierarchy. Particularly sacred places attract Hindus from all over India, despite the relatively remote locations of some, whereas less important shrines attract primarily local pilgrims (Figure 6-11).



**FIGURE 6-11** Hierarchy of Hindu holy places. Some places are important to Hindus all over India and are visited frequently, whereas others have importance only to nearby residents. The map also shows that holy places for particular deities are somewhat clustered in different regions of the country—Shakti in the east, Vishnu in the west, and Siva in the north and south.

Because Hinduism has no central authority, the relative importance of shrines is established by tradition, not by doctrine. For example, many Hindus make long-distance pilgrimages to Mt. Kailās, located at the source of the Ganges in the Himalayas, which is holy because Siva lives there. At the same time, other mountains may attract only local pilgrims. Throughout India, local residents may consider a nearby mountain to be holy if Siva is thought to have visited it at one time.

Hindus believe that they achieve purification by bathing in holy rivers. The Ganges is the holiest river in India, because it is supposed to spring forth from the hair of Siva, one of the main deities. Indians come from all over the country to Hardwār, the most popular location for bathing in the Ganges.

The remoteness of holy places from population clusters once meant that making a pilgrimage required major commitments of time and money as well as undergoing considerable physical



Bathing in the Ganges River. The river attracts Hindu pilgrims from all over India, because they believe that the Ganges springs from the hair of Siva, one of the main deities. Hindus achieve purification by bathing in the Ganges, and bodies of the dead are washed with water from it before being cremated.

hardship. However, recent improvements in transportation have increased the accessibility of shrines. Hindus can now reach holy places in the Himalaya Mountains by bus or car, and Muslims from all over the world can reach Makkah by airplane.

**COSMOGONY IN ETHNIC RELIGIONS.** Ethnic religions differ from universalizing religions in their understanding of relationships between human beings and nature. These differences derive from distinctive concepts of **cosmogony**, which is a set of religious beliefs concerning the origin of the universe. A variety of events in the physical environment are more likely to be incorporated into the principles of an ethnic religion. These events range from familiar and predictable to unexpected disasters.

For example, Chinese ethnic religions, such as Confucianism and Daoism, believe that the universe is made up of two forces, yin and yang, which exist in everything. The yin force is associated with earth, darkness, female, cold, depth, passivity, and death. The yang force is associated with heaven, light, male, heat, height, activity, and life. Yin and yang forces interact with each other to achieve balance and harmony, but they are in a constant state of change. An imbalance results in disorder and chaos. The principle of yin and yang applies to the creation and transformation of all natural features.

The universalizing religions that originated in Southwest Asia, notably Christianity and Islam, consider that God created the universe, including Earth's physical environment and human beings. A religious person can serve God by cultivating

the land, draining wetlands, clearing forests, building new settlements, and otherwise making productive use of natural features that God created. As the very creator of Earth itself, God is more powerful than any force of nature, and if in conflict, the laws of God take precedence over laws of nature.

Christian and Islamic cosmogony differ in some respects. For example, Christians believe that Earth was given by God to humanity to finish the task of creation. Obeying the all-supreme power of God meant independence from the tyranny of natural forces. Muslims regard humans as representatives of God on Earth, capable of reflecting the attributes of God in their deeds, such as growing food or other hard work to improve the land. But humans are not partners with God, who alone was responsible for Earth's creation.

In the name of God, some people have sought mastery over nature, not merely independence from it. Large-scale development of remaining wilderness is advocated by some religious people as a way to serve God. To those who follow this approach, failure to make full and complete use of Earth's natural resources is considered a violation of biblical teachings.

Christians are more likely to consider floods, droughts, and other natural disasters to be preventable and may take steps to overcome the problem by modifying the environment. However, some Christians regard natural disasters as punishment for human sins.

Adherents of ethnic religions do not attempt to transform the environment to the same extent. To animists, for example, God's powers are mystical, and only a few people on Earth can harness these powers for medical or other purposes. God can be placated, however, through prayer and sacrifice. Environmental hazards may be accepted as normal and unavoidable.

## The Calendar

Universalizing and ethnic religions have different approaches to the calendar. An ethnic religion typically has a more clustered distribution than a universalizing religion, in part because its holidays are based on the distinctive physical geography of the homeland. In universalizing religions, major holidays relate to events in the life of the founder rather than to the changing seasons of one particular place.

### The Calendar in Ethnic Religions

A prominent feature of ethnic religions is celebration of the seasons—the calendar's annual cycle of variation in climatic conditions. Knowledge of the calendar is critical to successful agriculture, whether for sedentary crop farmers or nomadic animal herders. The seasonal variations of temperature and precipitation help farmers select the appropriate times for planting and harvesting and make the best choice of crops.

Rituals are performed to pray for favorable environmental conditions or to give thanks for past success. The major religious events of the Bontok people of the Philippines, for example, revolve around the agricultural calendar. Sacred moments, known as *obaya*, include the times when the rice field is initially prepared, when the seeds are planted, when the seedlings are transplanted, when the harvest is begun, and when the harvest is complete.

**THE JEWISH CALENDAR.** Judaism is classified as an ethnic, rather than a universalizing, religion in part because its major holidays are based on events in the agricultural calendar of the religion's homeland in present-day Israel. In that Mediterranean agricultural region, grain crops generally are planted in autumn, which is a time of hope and worry over whether the winter's rainfall will be sufficient. The two holiest days in the Jewish calendar, Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), come in the autumn.

The other three most important holidays in Judaism originally related even more closely to the agricultural cycle. *Sukkot* celebrates the final gathering of fruits for the year, and prayers, especially for rain, are offered to bring success in the upcoming agricultural year. *Pesach* (Passover) derives from traditional agricultural practices in which farmers offered God the first fruits of the new spring harvest and herders sacrificed a young animal at the time when cows began to calve. *Shavuot* (Feast of Weeks) comes at the end of the grain harvest.

These three agricultural holidays later gained importance because they also commemorated events in the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, as recounted in the Bible. *Pesach* recalled the liberation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt and the miracle of their successful flight under the leadership of Moses. *Sukkot* derived from the Hebrew word for the *booths*, or temporary shelters, occupied by Jews during their wandering in the wilderness for 40 years after fleeing Egypt. *Shavuot* was considered the date during the wandering when Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. The reinterpretation of natural holidays in light of historical events has been especially important for Jews in the United States, Western Europe, and other regions who are unfamiliar with the agricultural calendar of the Middle East.

In daily business North Americans use the solar calendar of 12 months, each containing 30 or 31 days, taking up the astronomical slack with 28 or 29 days in February. But Israel—the only country where Jews are in the majority—uses a lunar rather than a solar calendar. The Moon has a mystical quality because of its variation from one day to the next. From its fullest disk, the Moon becomes smaller and disappears altogether (“new Moon”) before reappearing and expanding to a full Moon again. The appearance of the new Moon marks the new month in Judaism and Islam and is a holiday for both religions.

The lunar month is only about 29 days long, so a lunar year of about 350 days quickly becomes out of step with the agricultural seasons. The Jewish calendar solves the problem by adding an extra month seven out of every 19 years, so that its principal holidays are celebrated in the same season every year.

**THE SOLSTICE.** The *solstice* has special significance in some ethnic religions. A major holiday in some pagan religions is the winter solstice, December 21 or 22 in the Northern Hemisphere and June 21 or 22 in the Southern Hemisphere. The winter solstice is the shortest day and longest night of the year, when the Sun appears lowest in the sky and appears to stand still (*solstice* comes from the Latin *to stand still*). Stonehenge, a collection of rocks erected in southwestern England, probably by the Druids, is a prominent remnant of a pagan structure apparently aligned so the Sun rises between two stones on the solstice.

If you stand at the western facade of the U.S. Capitol in Washington at sunset on the summer solstice (June 21 or 22 in the Northern Hemisphere) and look down Pennsylvania Avenue, the Sun is directly over the center of the avenue. Similarly, at the winter solstice sunset is directly aligned with the view from the Capitol down Maryland Avenue. Will archaeologists of the distant future think we erected the Capitol Building and aligned the streets as a religious ritual? Did the planner of Washington, Pierre L'Enfant, create the pattern accidentally or deliberately, and if so, why?

## The Calendar in Universalizing Religions

The principal purpose of the holidays in universalizing religions is to commemorate events in the founder's life. Christians in particular associate their holidays with seasonal variations in the calendar, but climate and the agricultural cycle are not central to the liturgy and rituals.

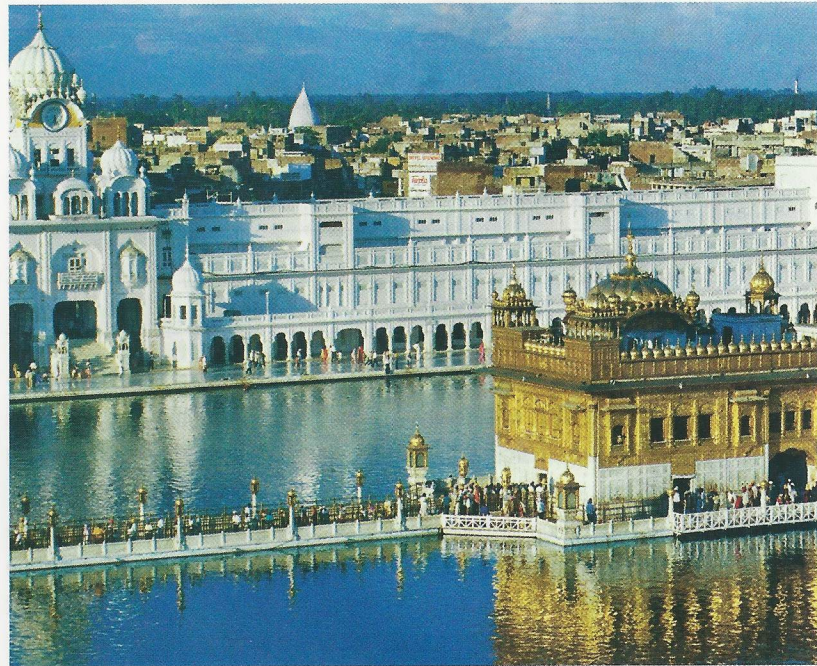
**ISLAMIC AND BAHÁ'Í CALENDARS.** Islam, like Judaism, uses a lunar calendar. Whereas the Jewish calendar inserts an extra month every few years to match the agricultural and solar calendars, Islam as a universalizing religion retains a strict lunar calendar. In a 30-year cycle the Islamic calendar has 19 years with 354 days and 11 years with 355 days.

As a result of using a lunar calendar, Muslim holidays arrive in different seasons from generation to generation. For example, during the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims fast during daylight every day and try to make a pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah. At the moment, the start of Ramadan is occurring in the Northern Hemisphere summer—for example, September 1, 2008, on the western Gregorian calendar. In A.D. 1990 Ramadan fell in March, and in A.D. 2020 Ramadan will be in April. Because Ramadan occurs at different times of the solar year in different generations, the number of hours of the daily fast varies widely, because the amount of daylight varies by season and by location on Earth's surface.

Observance of Ramadan can be a hardship by interfering with critical agricultural activities, depending on the season. However, as a universalizing religion with more than 1 billion adherents worldwide, Islam is practiced in various climates and latitudes. If Ramadan were fixed at the same time of the Middle East's agricultural year, Muslims in various places of the world would need to make different adjustments to observe Ramadan.

The Bahá'ís use 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 four intercalary days (five in leap years). The year begins on the first day of spring, March 21, which is one of several holy days in the Bahá'í calendar. Bahá'ís are supposed to attend the Nineteen Day Feast, held on the first day of each month of the Bahá'í calendar, to pray, read scriptures, and discuss community activities.

**CHRISTIAN, BUDDHIST, AND SIKH HOLIDAYS.** Christians commemorate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter, observed on the first Sunday after the first full Moon following the spring equinox in late March. But not all Christians observe Easter on the same day, because Protestant and Roman Catholic branches



The Darbar Sahib, or Golden Temple, at Amritsar, the most holy structure for the world's 25 million Sikhs, 22 million of whom are situated nearby in northwestern India.

calculate the date on the Gregorian calendar, but Eastern Orthodox churches use the Julian calendar.

Christians may relate Easter to the agricultural cycle, but that relationship differs depending on where they live. In Southern Europe, Easter is a joyous time of harvest. Northern Europe and North America do not have a major Christian holiday at harvest time, which would be placed in the fall. Instead, Easter in Northern Europe and North America is a time of anxiety over planting new crops, as well as a celebration of spring's arrival after a harsh winter. In the United States and Canada, Thanksgiving has been endowed with Christian prayers to play the role of harvest festival.

Most Northern Europeans and North Americans associate Christmas, the birthday of Jesus, with winter conditions, such as low temperatures, snow cover, and the absence of vegetation except for needleleaf evergreens. But for Christians in the Southern Hemisphere, December 25 is the height of the summer, with warm days and abundant sunlight.

All Buddhists celebrate as major holidays Buddha's birth, Enlightenment, and death. However, Buddhists do not all observe them on the same days. Japanese Buddhists celebrate Buddha's birth on April 8, his Enlightenment on December 8, and his death on February 15, whereas Theravadin Buddhists observe all three events on the same day, usually in April.

The major holidays in Sikhism are the births and deaths of the religion's ten gurus. The tenth guru, Gobind Singh, declared that after his death, instead of an eleventh guru, Sikhism's highest spiritual authority would be the holy scriptures of the Guru Granth Sahib. A major holiday in Sikhism is the day when the Holy Granth was installed as the religion's spiritual guide. Commemorating historical events distinguishes Sikhism as a universalizing religion, in contrast to India's major ethnic religion, Hinduism, which glorifies the physical geography of India.