Religions

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Key Issues

• Where are religions distributed?
• Why do religions have different distributions?
• Why do religions organize space and distinctive patterns?
• Why do territorial conflicts arise among religious groups?
Learning Outcomes

• 6.1.1: Describe the distribution of the major religions.
• 6.1.2: Describe the distribution of the major branches of Christianity.
• 6.1.3: Identify the major branches of Islam and Buddhism.
• 6.1.4: Describe the distribution of the largest ethnic religions.
Learning Outcomes

- 6.2.1: Describe the process of origin of universalizing religions.
- 6.2.2: Understand differences in the origin of universalizing and ethnic religions.
- 6.2.3: Describe the process of diffusion of universalizing religions.
- 6.2.4: Compare the diffusion of universalizing and ethnic religions.
Learning Outcomes

• 6.3.1: Compare the role of places of worship and various religions.
• 6.3.2: Explain why places are sacred in universalizing religions.
• 6.3.3: Analyze the importance of the physical geography in ethnic religions.
• 6.3.4: Describe ways in which the landscape is used in religiously significant ways.
• 6.3.5: Compare the calendars and holidays of ethnic and universalizing religions.
Learning Outcomes

• 6.3.6: Compare the administrative organization of hierarchical and locally autonomous religions.
• 6.4.1: Understand reasons for religious conflicts arising from government policies.
• 6.4.2: Summarize reasons for conflicts between religions.
• 6.4.3: Analyze reasons for religious conflicts in the Middle East.
• 6.4.4: Describe differences in geographic frameworks in the Middle East.
Where Are Religions Distributed?

• Distribution of Religions
  – Geographers distinguish two types of religions:
    1. *Universalizing religions* - attempt to be global by appealing to all people regardless of location or culture.
       – 58 percent of world’s population practices a universalizing religion.
         » Christianity: 2.1 billion Christians
         » Islam: 1.5 billion Muslims
         » Buddhism: 376 million Buddhists
    2. *Ethnic religions* - appeal primarily to one group of people living in one place.
       – 26 percent of world’s population practices an ethnic religion.
Where Are Religions Distributed?

• Branches of Universalizing Religions
  – Three principal universalizing religions 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.
Where Are Religions Distributed?

• Branches of Universalizing Religions
  – Branches of Christianity in Europe
    • Three major branches include…
      1. Roman Catholic (51 percent of the world’s Christians)
      2. Protestant (24 percent of the world’s Christians)
      3. Orthodox (11 percent of the world’s Christians)
    • Distributions
      – Roman Catholicism dominant branch in southwestern and eastern Europe.
      – Protestantism dominant branch in northwestern Europe.
      – Orthodoxy dominant branch in eastern and southeastern Europe.
Where Are Religions Distributed?

• Branches of Universalizing Religions
  – Branches of Christianity in the Western Hemisphere
    • 93 percent of Christians in Latin America are Roman Catholic.
      – 40 percent in North America
    • Protestant churches have approximately 82 million members in the United States.
      – Baptist church has largest number of adherents (37 million).
Where Are Religions Distributed?

• Islam
  – Branches of Islam
    • Two major branches include…
      1. Sunni
         » Largest branch in most Muslim countries in Southwest Asia and North Africa
         » 83 percent of all Muslims
      2. Shiite
         » Greatly concentrated in the Middle Eastern countries of Iran, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Oman, and Bahrain
         » 16 percent of all Muslims
Where Are Religions Distributed?

• Buddhism
  – Branches of Buddhism
  • Three major branches include…
    1. Mahayana
      » 56 percent of Buddhists
      » Located primarily in China, Japan, and Korea
    2. Theravada
      » 38 percent of Buddhists
      » Located primarily in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand
    3. Vajrayana
      » 6 percent of Buddhists
      » Located primarily in Tibet and Mongolia.
Where Are Religions Distributed?

- **Ethnic Religions**
  - Often remain within the culture where they originated.
  - Typically have relatively more clustered distributions than do universalizing religions.
  - Ethnic religion with largest number of followers is Hinduism.
    - 900 million adherents
      - Nearly all concentrated in India and Nepal
Percent of world Hindu population

- India: 90%
- Bangladesh: 2%
- Nepal: 3%
- Other: 5%
Where Are Religions Distributed?

• Ethnic Religions
  – A combination of Buddhism (a universalizing religion) with Confucianism, Taoism, and other traditional Chinese practices is practiced in East Asia and Southeast Asia.
    • Blending or combining of several traditions is known as *syncretism*.
  – *Animism* is an ethnic religion whose followers believe that inanimate objects or natural events, such as natural disasters, have spirits and conscious life.
    • 100 million Africans adhere to animism.
Where Are Religions Distributed?

• Ethnic Religions
  – Judaism
    • First recorded religion to espouse *monotheism*, belief that there is only one God.
      – Contrasts *polytheism*- the worship of a collection of gods.
    • Distribution
      – 2/5 live in the United States
      – 2/5 live in Israel.
    • Christianity and Islam find some of their roots in Judaism.
Why Do Religions Have Different Distributions?

• Origins of Religions
  – Universalizing regions have precise places of origin.
    • Often based on events in the life of an influential man.
  – Ethnic religions not tied to single historical individual; often have unclear or unknown origins.
  – Buddhism
    • Founded: ~2,500 years ago
    • Founder: Siddhartha Gautama
    • Origin: India
Why Do Religions Have Different Distributions?

- Origins of Religions
  - Christianity
    - Founded: ~2,000 years ago
    - Founding: Based on teachings of Jesus
    - Origin: Region located in present-day Palestine
  - Islam
    - Founded: ~1,500 years ago
    - Founder: Prophet Muhammad
    - Origin: Makkah (Mecca) located in present-day Saudi Arabia
Why Do Religions Have Different Distributions?

• Diffusion of Religions
  – Asia is home to each hearth for Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism.
  – Followers transmitted the messages preached in the hearths to people elsewhere.
  – Each of the three main universalizing religions has a distinct diffusion pattern.
Why Do Religions Have Different Distributions?

• Diffusion of Religions
  – Christianity
    • Hierarchical Diffusion
      – Emperor Constantine helped diffuse the religion throughout the Roman Empire by embracing Christianity.
    • Relocation Diffusion
      – *Missionaries*, individuals who help transmit a religion through relocation diffusion, initially diffused the religion along protected sea routes and the excellent Roman roads.
      – Migration and missionary activity by Europeans since 1500 have extended Christianity all over the world.
        » Permanent resettlement in the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand
Why Do Religions Have Different Distributions?

• Diffusion of Religions
  – Islam
    • Muhammad’s successors organized followers into armies and led a conquest to spread the religion over an extensive area of…
      – Africa
      – Asia
      – Europe
    • Relocation diffusion of missionaries to portions of sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia transmitted the religion well beyond its hearth.
Why Do Religions Have Different Distributions?

• Diffusion of Religions
  – Buddhism
    • Diffused relatively slowly from its origin in northeastern India.
    • Emperor Asoka accredited with much of its diffusion throughout the Magadhan Empire (273 to 232 B.C.).
      – Missionaries sent to territories neighboring the empire.
    • Buddhism introduced to China along trade routes in the first century A.D.
Why Do Religions Have Different Distributions?

• Diffusion of Religions
  – Ethnic Religions
    • Most have limited, if any, diffusion.
      – Lack missionaries
    • Diffusion to new places is possible, if adherents migrate for economic gains and are not forced to adopt a strongly entrenched universalizing religion.
    • Judaism’s diffusion is unlike other ethnic religions because it is practiced well beyond its place of origin.
      – Other nationalities have historically persecuted Jews living in their midst because of their retention of Judaism.
Why Do Religions Organize Space in Distinctive Patterns?

• Sacred Space
  – Geographers study the impact on the landscape made by all religions.
  • Places of worship are sacred structures that physically anchor religion to landscape.
    – Christian Church
      » More significant role in Christianity than in other religions because of belief that building is the house of God.
      » Church traditionally largest and tallest building in a community. Additional significance given to it by locating it in a prominent location—e.g., square or center of town
      » No single architectural style
    – Bahá’í Houses of Worship
      » Dispersed to different continents
      » Open to adherents of all religions
Why Do Religions Organize Space in Distinctive Patterns?

• Sacred Space
  – Muslim Mosques
    » Space for community assembly
    » Not viewed as a sanctified place
    » Attention to cardinal directions is emphasized—e.g., pulpit at end of a courtyard faces Makkah.
    » Distinctive feature is a minaret, a tower where a man known as a muezzin summons people to worship.
  – Buddhist Pagodas
    » Prominent and ornate element on landscape that often includes tall, many-sided towers arranged in a series of tiers, balconies, and slanting roofs.
    » Contain relics believed to be a portion of Buddha’s body or clothing.
    » Not designed for congregational worship.
Why Do Religions Organize Space in Distinctive Patterns?

• Sacred Places in Universalizing Religions
  – Cities and places associated with the founder’s life are endowed with holiness.
    • Not necessarily in close proximity of each other
    • Not needed to be related to any particular physical environment
  – Buddhism and Islam place most emphasis on identifying shrines that mark locations of important events in the life of Buddha or Muhammad.
    • *Pilgrimages*, journeys for religious purposes, are incorporated in Islamic doctrine.
Why Do Religions Organize Space in Distinctive Patterns?

• Sacred Places in Universalizing Religions
  – Holy Places in Islam
    • Holiest locations are in cities associated with Prophet Muhammad.
      – Holiest City is Makkah (Mecca), birthplace of Muhammad.
        » Now contains the holiest object in the Islamic landscape—al-Ka’ba—a cubelike structure encased in silk that stands in Islam’s largest mosque, Masjid al-Haram.
      – Second-most-holy place is Madinah (Medina).
        » Muhammad’s tomb is in Madinah.
Why Do Religions Organize Space in Distinctive Patterns?

• The Landscape in Ethnic Religions
  – Ethnic religions are closely tied to the physical geography of a particular place.
    • Hindu Landscape
      – Hinduism closely tied to physical geography of India
        » Mt. Kailas is holy because it is home to Siva.
        » Holiest places are riverbanks and coastlines.
        » Hindus believe that they achieve purification by bathing in holy rivers—e.g., Ganges River
    • Solstice
      – Special significance in some ethnic religions
        » Stonehenge is a prominent remnant of a pagan structure aligned so that sun rises between two stones on solstices.
Why Do Religions Organize Space in Distinctive Patterns?

• Disposing of the Dead
  – Climate, topography, and religious doctrine combine to create differences in practices to shelter the dead.
  • Burial
    – Christians, Muslims, and Jews typically bury the deceased in designated areas called cemeteries.
      » Cemeteries were typically only public open space in congested urban places prior to the nineteenth century.
  • Cremation
    – Hindus wash the bodies of the deceased with water from the Ganges River first, then burn them with a slow fire on a funeral pyre.
Why Do Religions Organize Space in Distinctive Patterns?

• Religious Settlements and Place Names
  – Most human settlements serve an economic purpose, but some are established primarily for religious reasons.
    • *Utopian settlement* is an ideal community built around a religious way of life.
      – Salt Lake City culminated the utopian movement in the United States when it was built by the Mormons.
  – Roman Catholic immigrants have frequently given religious place names, or *toponyms*, to settlements primarily in the U.S. Southwest and Quebec.
Why Do Religions Organize Space in Distinctive Patterns?

• The Calendar
  – Universalizing and ethnic religions approach the calendar differently.
    • Ethnic Religion
      – Holidays are closely aligned with natural events associated with the physical geography of the homeland.
      – Prominent feature is celebration of the seasons.
        » Closely tied to local agriculture
    • Universalizing Religion
      – Major holidays relate to events in the life of the founder rather than the seasons of one particular place.
        » Ramadan (Islam): part of five pillars of faith
        » Easter (Christian): resurrection of Jesus
Why Do Religions Organize Space in Distinctive Patterns?

• Administration of Space
  – Universalizing religions must be connected to ensure consistency of doctrine.
  • Hierarchical Religions
    – Exemplifies a well-defined geographic structure and organizes territory into local administrative units.
      » Roman Catholic Church created administrative units on much of Earth’s inhabited land with each being headed by a leader who is accountable to the next higher-ordered leader.
  • Locally Autonomous Religions
    – Islam
      » No religious hierarchy
      » No formal territorial organization
• Why Do Territorial Conflicts Arise among Religious Groups?
Why Do Territorial Conflicts Arise among Religious Groups?

- Religion versus Government
  - Religious groups may oppose policies seen as contradicting their religious values.
  - Religion is element of cultural diversity that has led to most conflict in places.
- Taliban versus Western Values
  - Taliban’s control of Afghanistan’s government in the 1990s led to strict laws opposing Western values.
    » “Western, non-Islamic” leisure activities banned
    » Ex: Soccer stadiums converted to settings for executions and floggings.
Why Do Territorial Conflicts Arise among Religious Groups?

• Religion versus Religion
  – Conflicts most likely to occur at a boundary between two religious groups.

• Religious Wars in Ireland
  – (Protestant v. Roman Catholic)
  – A small faction chose to join the United Kingdom when Ireland became independent in 1937.
    » 46 percent protestant and 40 percent Roman Catholic (2001)
  – Roman Catholics have been victimized by discriminatory practices, such as exclusion from higher-paying jobs and better schools.
  – Belfast, the capital city, is highly segregated.
  – Protests by Roman Catholics began in 1968 with bloodshed of both Protestants and Roman Catholics.
DISTRIBUTION OF CATHOLICS AND PROTESTANTS IN BELFAST

- Highways
- Major roads
- Railroads
- City limits
- Park, sports fields

Percent Catholic
- 81 and above
- 61–80
- 41–60
- 21–40
- Below 21
Why Do Territorial Conflicts Arise among Religious Groups?

- Religious Wars in the Middle East
  - Conflict in the Middle East is among the world’s longest standing.
    - Jews, Christians, and Muslims have fought nearly 2,000 years to control the same small strip of land in the Eastern Mediterranean.
      - Judaism: special claim to the territory it calls the Promised Land where major events in the development of the religion occurred.
      - Islam: Muslim army conquered this land in seventh century A.D. Jerusalem is the third holiest city to Muslims, because it is believed to be where Muhammad ascended into heaven.
      - Christianity: considers it the Holy Land and Jerusalem the Holy City, because the major events in Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection occurred there.
Why Do Territorial Conflicts Arise among Religious Groups?

• Conflicting Perspectives of the Holy Land
  – After the 1973 war, the Palestinians emerged as Israel’s principal opponent.
  – Palestinians viewed themselves as the legitimate rulers of Israel.

  • Biggest obstacle to peace in the Middle East is the status of Jerusalem.
    – Peace will likely not be possible, if one religion has political control over Jerusalem.
Summary

• The world has three large universalizing religions—Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism—each of which is divided into branches and denominations.

• A universalizing religion has a known origin and clear patterns of diffusion, whereas ethnic religions typically have unknown origins and little diffusion.
Summary

• Holy places and holidays in a universalizing religion are related to the events in the life of its founder or prophet. They are related to the local physical geography in an ethnic religion.

• With the Earth’s surface dominated by four large religions, expansion of the territory occupied by one religion may reduce the territory of another.