Religion and Geography

**The Geography of Religion**

**Religion and Geography**

Religion: A social system involving a set of beliefs and practices through which people seek harmony with the universe and attempt to influence the forces of nature, life, and death through prayers, incantations, actions, and works of charity and sacrifice.

Secularism: the indifference to or rejection of religion; worldly.

Symbols

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Religion and Culture

Cultural innovation

- Joins adherents into a single moral community through a value system that involves formal or informal worship and faith in the sacred and divine
- May intimately affect all facets of a culture
- May affect interaction between culture groups
- Varies in its cultural role – dominating in some societies, unimportant or even repressed in others

Adherents Worldwide by Religious Group

- Christianity 33%
- Islam 21%
- Nonreligion (secular) 16%
- Hinduism 14%
- Buddhism 6%
- Taoic religions 6%
- Animism/shamanism 6%
- Sikhism 0.36%
- Judaism 0.22%

Classifying Religions

- Animism – Belief system based on place with sacredness associated with specific sites and inanimate objects; considered the first religious system
- Polytheism – The worship of many gods, usually earth-based gods.
- Monotheism – The worship of only one God, a sky-centered god looking down upon world’s people.
- Orthodox – Strands within a major religion that emphasize purity of faith.
- Fundamentalism – A movement to return to the founding principles of a religion, which can include literal interpretation of sacred texts, or the attempt to follow the ways of a religious founder as closely as possible.

Classifying Religions

- Universalizing (proselytic) religions – Claim applicability to all persons and seek conversion of all; have precise places of origin, based on historic events in the life of a man. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism
- Ethnic religions – Identified with a particular ethnic group; clustered distribution; does not seek converts; have unknown or unclear origins, not tied to single historical individuals. Judaism, Hinduism, Shinto
- Tribal (traditional) religions – Ethnic (indigenous, community) religions specific to small, preindustrial cultures having close ties to nature. Animism, Shamanism
- Syncretic religions – Religions, or strands within religions, that combine elements of two or more belief systems.
- Secularism – Indifference to or rejection of religion and religious belief

Religious Regions of the US


New England: Catholic
South: Baptist
Upper Midwest: Lutheran
Southwest: Spanish Catholic
West, Midlands: no dominant denomination

World Distribution of Major Religions

Religious Adherence in the United States

Indifference to or rejection of organized religious affiliations and ideas
• Varies greatly from country to country and within countries.
• Antireligious ideologies can contribute to the decline of organized religions.
• Church membership figures do not accurately reflect active participation.

Hearth and Diffusion

Religious hearth
• A focused geographic area where important spiritual innovations are born and from which they spread.

Religious diffusion
• The spread of spiritual innovations (religion) from the hearth to other areas (near and far) by spread from the core (expansion diffusion/contagious diffusion) or by the migration of adherents to distant lands (relocation diffusion).

Origin and Diffusion of the Five Major World Religions
1. Semitic religious hearth
   Judaism, Christianity, Islam
2. Indus-Ganges hearth
   Hinduism, Buddhism
3. East Asian religious hearth
   Confucianism, Taoism

Diffusion of Universalizing Religions

Ethnic Religions

Most ethnic religions have limited, if any, diffusion.
• These religions lack missionaries.
• Diffusion of universalizing religions, especially Christianity and Islam, typically comes at the expense of ethnic religions.
Mingling of Ethnic and Universalizing Religions

Universalizing religions may supplant ethnic religions or mingle with them (assimilation/acculturation).

Equatorial Guinea, a former Spanish colony, is mostly Roman Catholic, whereas Namibia, a former German colony, is heavily Lutheran.

This relationship can also be seen in former French and British colonies and is similar to language and legal systems in use.

Elsewhere, traditional African religious ideas and practices have been merged with Christianity.

Religious Ecology

Special relationship with nature:
Belief that the earth and its elements were created especially for the use of its people.

Appeasing the forces of nature:
– Religion as adaptive strategy to prevent natural hazards and survive the elements
– The wrath of god comes in the form of severe natural events

Religious rituals and holidays are observed (scheduled) when they coincide with astronomical (celestial) events:
• Lunar cycles
• Equinoxes and solstices
• Appearance of constellations

Religious Ecology

Certain physical features become sacred places in world religions:
• Rivers: Ganges, Jordan
• Mountains: Mt. Fuji, Denali, various volcanoes
• Trees: various “Trees of Life”
• Forests: Sacred forests of India
• Rock formations: Shiprock (NM), Uluru (Australia)

Religious Ecology

Uluru, called Ayers Rock by the English in 1870, is a monolith rising 1,100 ft. over the Australian desert. It is a sacred place to local Aboriginal peoples.
The Australian government returned it to Aboriginal ownership in 1993 and changed its name back to its original.

Throughout the day changing sun angle alters its colors until it turns red and orange as the sun sets.

Cultural Interaction in Religion

Religion and economy
Religious beliefs affect crop and livestock choices, as well as dietary habits.
• Muslim prohibition of pork
• Hinduism’s sacred cows
• Catholic meatless Fridays (past)

Religious pilgrimage
– Journeys to sacred spaces have strong impacts on local economies.
– Major destinations: Israel, Rome, Mecca
– Important locations: sites of an individual religious event or special structure (miracle, birth place, battle)

Religious Landscapes

Religion is displayed on the landscape through the works of people or the designation of natural sites as being sacred.
• Structures: churches, mosques, temples, pagodas
• Faithful details – styles, colors and ornamentation associated with religion
• Landscapes of the dead – religious burial practices
• Sacred space – areas recognized as having spiritual significance, may be claimed by more than one group
• Names on the land – religious toponomy designating, honoring, and commemorating aspects of religiosity
Religion and the Cultural Landscape

Sacred Sites
- Places or spaces people infuse with religious meaning
- Pilgrimage: Adherents voluntarily travel to a religious site to pay respects or participate in a ritual at the site
- Includes structures associated with religion
  - Buildings, shrines, altars, monuments
  - Statues, cemeteries, art work from plain to ornate, message boards

Holy Places
- Religions may elevate places to a holy position.
  - For an ethnic religion 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.
  - Making a pilgrimage to these holy places is incorporated into the rituals of some universalizing and ethnic religions.

Sacred Site
- Western Wall of ancient Jewish temple and the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem

Jerusalem
- The Old City of Jerusalem contains holy sites for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Sacred Sites
- Our Lady of Lourdes Shrine, France
- Hill Cumorah, Palmyra, N.Y
- Temple of Emerald Buddha, Bangkok
- Great Mosque, Senegal

Pilgrimages to the Holy Land
Pilgrimages to India

Islamic Pilgrimages

Pilgrimages to Rome

Religious Structures

Structures Associated with a Religion

Catalog of Religious Buildings found in New Delhi, India
Burial Practices

All cultures deal with dying and death.
- Promise of an eternal afterlife helps to ease the anguish of death for the living.
- Concepts of heaven and hell in some form exist in all religions with “instructions” of how to get there or avoid it.
- Rituals associated with death as well as preferred means to deal with dead bodies have developed over time and have become part of the cultural landscape.

http://www.cr.nps.gov/nR/publications/bulletins/nrb41/nrb41_5.htm
http://www.thefuneralsource.org/tfs001.html

Landscapes of the Dead

Necropolis, Egypt

Taj Mahal, India

Pyramids of Egypt

Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico

Religious Toponomy

Can you identify the French-Catholic settled area?

Role of Religion in Political Conflict

Conflicts along Religious Borders
- **Interfaith boundaries**: boundaries between the world’s major faiths
  - Christian-Muslim boundaries in Africa
- **Intrafaith boundaries**: boundaries within a single major faith
  - Christian Protestants and Catholics,
  - Muslim Sunni and Shi’ite
Religion Conflict Zones in Africa

Religion and Political Conflict
- Israel and Palestine
  - WWII, 1967 Arab-Israeli War, West Bank, Hamas
- Nigeria
  - Muslim North vs. Christian South
- The Former Yugoslavia
  - Balkan Peninsula separates the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church
- Northern Ireland
  - Catholics and Protestants in the North

Religious Fundamentalism and Extremism

- Religious fundamentalism
  - Beliefs are nonnegotiable and uncompromising
- Religious extremism
  - Fundamentalism carried to the point of violence
  - Fundamentalists can be extremists but this does not mean that all fundamentalists (of any faith) are extremists.

- Cultural aspects can be identified and mapped.
- Core/source areas can be located.
- Means of diffusion can be studied.
- Movement’s influence on an area can be profound including many aspects of landscape.

NEXT

AGRICULTURE

God willing!