Guest Field Note

Ardmore, Ireland

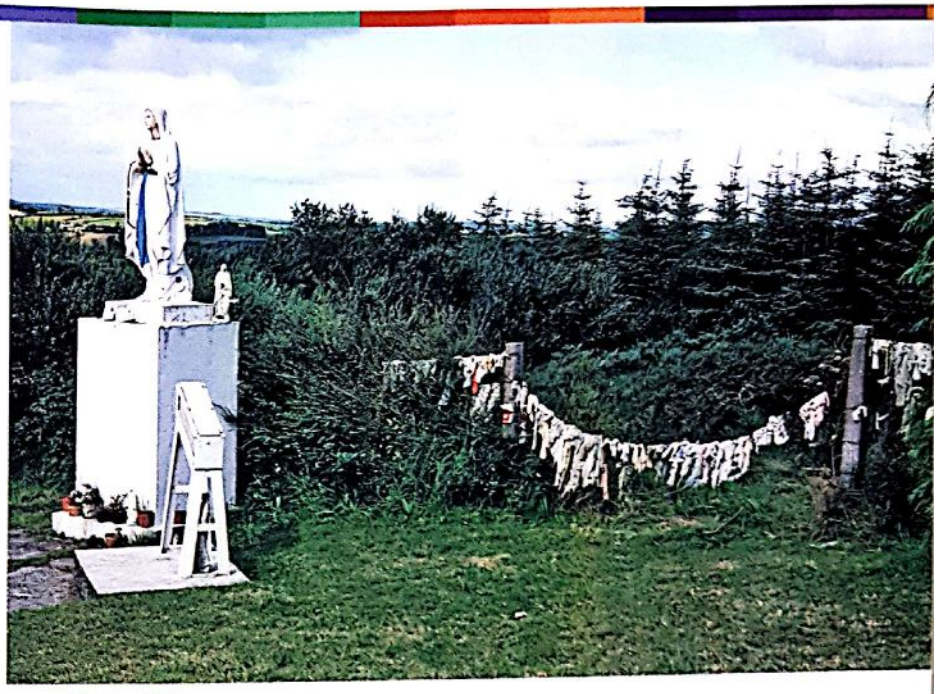

Figure 7.18

At Saint Declan's Holy Well in Ireland, I found a barbed wire fence substituting for the more traditional thorn tree as a place to hang scraps of clothing as offerings. This tradition, which died out long ago in most parts of Continental Europe, was one of many aspects of Irish pilgrimage that led me to speculate on "Galway-to-the-Ganges" survival of very old religious customs on the extreme margins of an ancient Indo-European culture realm. My subsequent field work focused on contemporary European pilgrimage, but my curiosity about the geographical extent of certain ancient pilgrimage themes lingered. While traveling in Asia, I found many similarities among sacred sites across religions. Each religion has formation stories, explanations of how particular sites, whether Buddhist monasteries or Irish wells, were recognized as sacred. Many of these stories have similar elements. And, in 1998, I traveled across Russia from the remote Kamchatka Peninsula to Saint Petersburg. Imagine my surprise to find the tradition of hanging rag offerings on trees alive and well all the way across the Russian Far East and Siberia, at least as far west as Olkon Island in Lake Baikal.

Credit: Mary Lee Nolan, Oregon State University

Access to and use of physical geographic features is constrained by private ownership, environmental concerns, and designation of certain sacred spaces as public recreational or tourist areas. Geographer Kari Forbes-Boyte studied Bear Butte, a site sacred to members of the Lakota and Cheyenne people in the northern Great Plains of the United States and a site that became a state park in the 1960s. Bear Butte is used today by both Lakota and Cheyenne people in religious ceremonies and by tourists who seek access to the recreational site. Nearby Devils Tower, Wyoming, experiences the same pull between religious use by American Indians and recreational use by tourists.

Places such as Bear Butte and Devils Tower experience contention because one group sees the sites as sacred and another group does not. In many parts of the world, sacred sites are claimed as holy or significant to adherents of more than one religious faith. In India several sites are considered sacred by Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains. Specifically, Volture Peak in Rajgir in northeastern India is holy to Buddhists because it is the site where Buddha first proclaimed the Heart Sutra, a very important canon of Buddhism. Hindus and Jains also consider the site holy because they consider Buddha to be a god or prophet. Fortunately, this site has created little discord among religious groups. Pilgrims of all faiths peacefully congregate in the place year after year. Other sacred sites are not so fortunate. Some of the most contentious sites are in Jerusalem, a city seen as holy by three major world religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Sacred Sites of Jerusalem

The ancient city of Jerusalem is sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Jews saw Jerusalem as sacred before the birth of Jesus, but most Jews fled from the city and surrounding area during the diaspora. For Jews, Jerusalem remained sacred even though they did not control it, and when the Zionist movement gained strength, Jews set their sights on controlling the sacred city once again. The most important sacred site for Jews is the Western Wall (also called the Wailing Wall), at the edge of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (Fig. 7.19). The Temple Mount was the site of the two great temples of the Jewish people. Occupying the top of a modest hill where, according to the Torah (the sacred book of Judaism that is also the Old Testament of Christianity's sacred book, the Bible),

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Figure 7.19
Jerusalem, Israel. The Western Wall, which is sacred to Jews, stands right next to the Dome of the Rock, which is sacred to Muslims. © Alexander B. Murphy.

Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac, Jews built two temples here, each of which was destroyed by invaders. The Western Wall is all that remains of the second temple, and Jews gather in the place to remember the destruction of the temples and to offer prayers. The name "Wailing Wall" evokes the sounds of mourning over the temple's demise (and the suffering of Jews over time) made by Jewish pilgrims.

For Christians, Jerusalem is sacred both because of the sacrifice Abraham was willing to make of his son at the Temple Mount and because Jesus's crucifixion took place outside of the city's walls. Jesus was then buried near the Cross (Jews only allowed kings to be buried inside the city walls) in a tomb Roman Emperor Constantine marked with a basilica that is now the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Fig. 7.20). Christians believe that from that tomb Jesus rose from the dead on Easter. For centuries the Roman, and then the Byzantine, Empire controlled the city and protected their sacred site.

In the seventh century, Muslim armies took control over the city from the Byzantine Empire. Muslims constructed a mosque called the Dome of the Rock adjacent to the Western Wall to mark the site where Muslims believe Muhammad arrived from Mecca and then ascended into heaven (Fig. 7.19). The site Jews call Temple Mount is called al-Haram al-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary) by Muslims.

Christians and Muslims fought the Crusades of the Middle Ages over the question of who should control the sacred land of Jerusalem. Between 1095 and 1199, European political and religious leaders organized a series of Crusades to retake the so-called Holy Land. The first Christian crusaders captured Jerusalem in 1099, ruling the city for almost 100 years. As the first crusaders made their way across what is modern-day Turkey on their way to Jerusalem, they also left a series of conquests in their wake—laying claim to the city of Antioch and a number of other strategically important sites. Some of the crusaders returned to Western Europe, but many settled, mingled, and intermarried with the local people. Muslims ultimately retook Jerusalem in 1187, and later Christian crusaders were unable to conquer it again. The Crusades helped cement a commitment by Christians to protect the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Similarly, the Crusades and then Zionism cemented a commitment by Muslims to protect the Dome of the Rock and by Jews to protect the Western Wall. The commitment by three major religions to protect and control their sacred sites has led to political turmoil that echoes far beyond Jerusalem, as we will see in the next section of this chapter.

Landscapes of Hinduism and Buddhism

Traditional Hinduism is more than a faith; it is a way of life. Pilgrimages follow prescribed routes, and rituals are attended by millions of people. Festivals and feasts are frequent, colorful, and noisy. Hindus believe that the erec-

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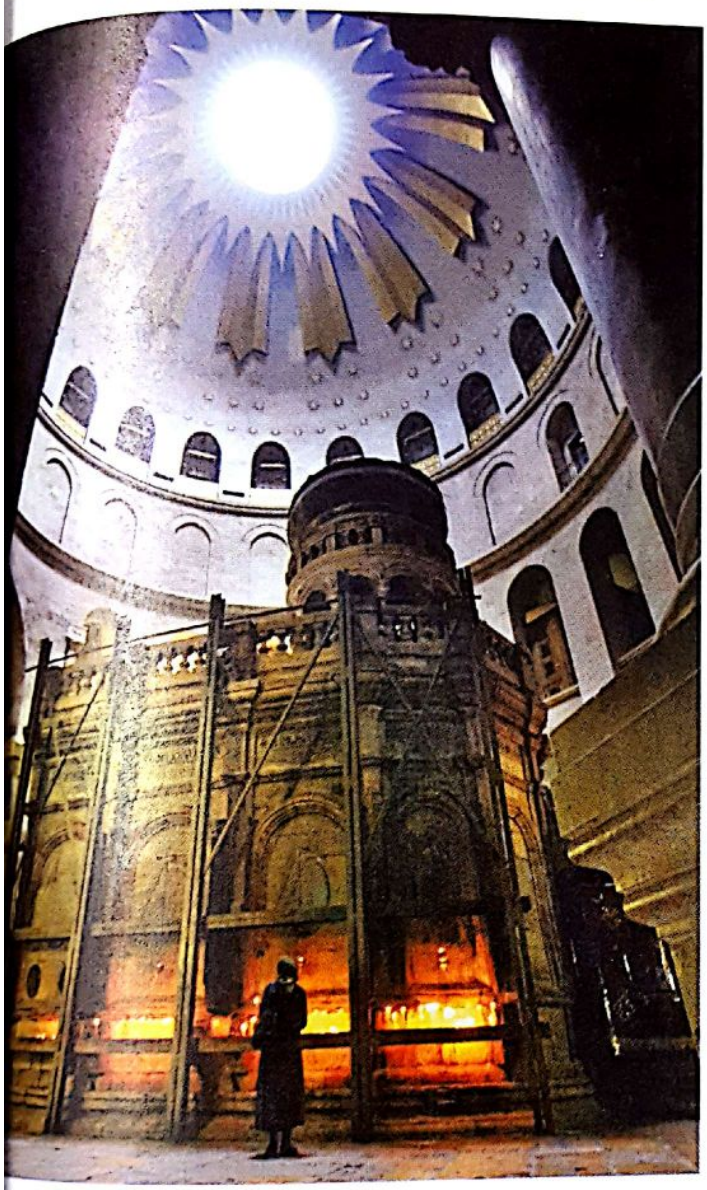

Figure 7.20
Jerusalem, Israel. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is sacred to Christians who believe it is the site where Jesus Christ was crucified. Inside the church, a Christian worshipper lights a candle at Jesus Christ's tomb. © Reuters/Corbis Images.

tion of a temple, whether modest or elaborate, bestows merit on the builder and will be rewarded. As a result, the Hindu cultural landscape—urban as well as rural—is dotted with countless shrines, ranging from small village temples to structures so large and elaborate that they are virtually holy cities. The location of shrines is important because Hindus prescribe that such holy places should minimally disrupt the natural landscape. Whenever possible, a Hindu temple is located in a "comfortable" position, for example, under a large, shady tree. Hindus also desire their temples be near water because many gods will not venture far from water and because water has a holy function, *ritual bathing*, in Hinduism (Fig. 7.21). A village temple should face the village from a prominent position, and followers must make offerings frequently. Small offerings of fruit and flowers lie before the sanctuary of the deity honored by the shrine.

The cultural landscape of Hinduism is the cultural landscape of India, its main culture region. As one travels through India, the Hindu faith is a visual as well as an emotional experience. Temples and shrines, holy animals by the tens of millions, distinctively garbed holy men, and the sights and sounds of long processions and rituals all contribute to a unique atmosphere.

When Buddha received enlightenment, he sat under a large tree, the Bodhi (enlightenment) tree at Bodh Gaya in India. The Bodhi tree now growing on the site is believed to be a descendant of the original tree. The Bodhi tree has a thick, banyan-like trunk and a wide canopy of leafy branches. Because of its association with the Buddha, the tree is revered and protected. Buddhists make pilgrimages to Bodh Gaya and other places where Buddha may have taught beneath Bodhi branches. With Buddhism, the Bodhi tree diffused as far as China and Japan, its purposeful planting marking the cultural landscape of numerous villages and towns.

Buddhism's architecture includes some magnificent achievements, especially the famed structures at Borobudur in central Java (Indonesia). The Buddhism shrines include *stupas*, bell-shaped structures that protect burial mounds. Buddhists also construct temples that enshrine an image of Buddha in his familiar cross-legged pose, as well as large monasteries that tower over the local landscape. The pagoda is perhaps Buddhism's most familiar structure. Its shape is derived from the relic (often funeral) mounds of old. Every fragment of its construction is a meaningful representation of Buddhist philosophy (Fig. 7.22).

Along with the religious structures such as temples, we can see evidence of religion in the cultural landscapes of the dead. Traditionally, Hindus, and more recently Buddhists, and Shintoists cremate their dead. Thus, wherever a large pocket of Hindus, Buddhists, or Shintoists live, a crematorium will be nearby. The Hindu crematorium in Kenya stands in stark contrast to much of the rest of the cultural landscape and signals the presence of a large Hindu population (Fig. 7.3).

The cultural landscapes of South Asian religions extend into Southeast Asia, where several religions that began in the South Asian hearth (including Hinduism and Buddhism) diffused into Southeast Asia. Later, Islam replaced the South Asian religions in many of these places, especially Southeast Asia, and even later Christian missionaries gained adherents when Christian governments encouraged the migration of their people and their religion to their colonies in these areas. Today, we can stand in Singapore, study the cultural landscape, and see

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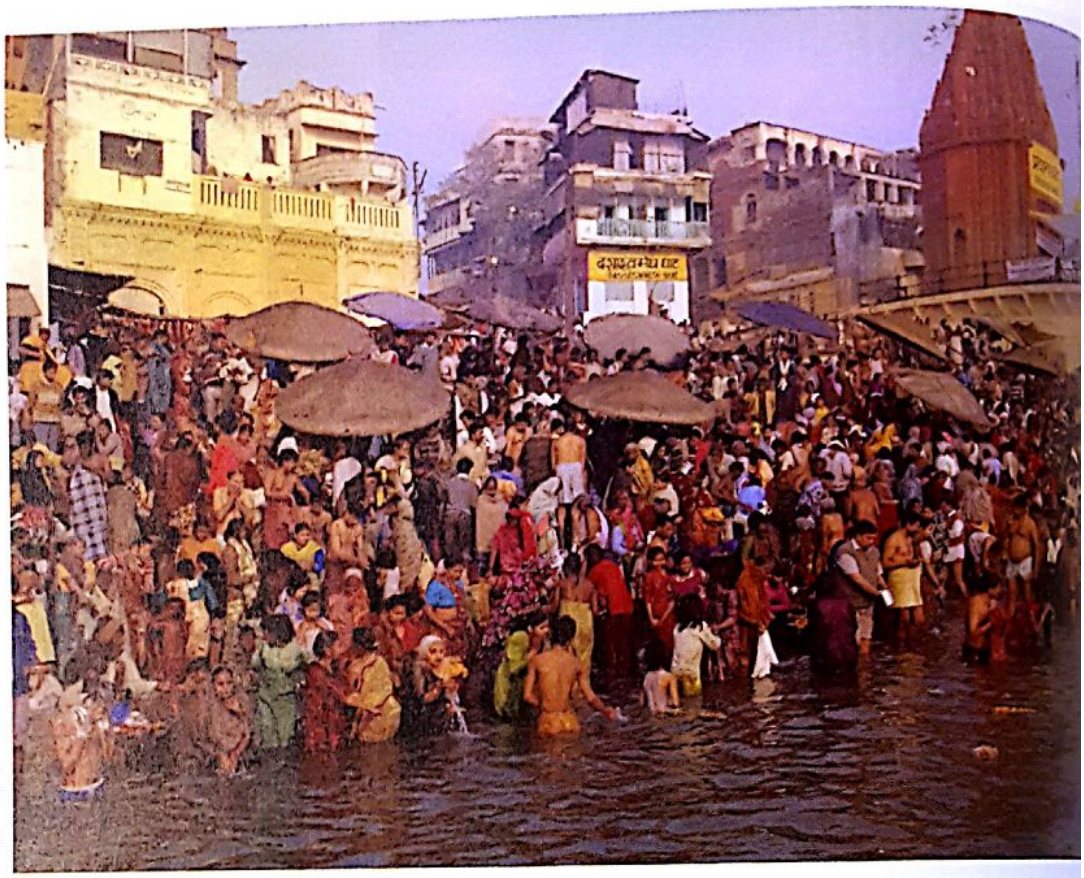

Figure 7.21
Varanasi, India. Hindus perform morning rituals in the Ganges River at one of Hinduism's most sacred places, the city of Varanasi, known as the city of Lord Shiva. © Gavin Hellier/Robert Harding World Imagery/Getty Images, Inc.

Field Note

"To reach the capital of Myanmar (Burma) we had to transfer to a ferry and sail up the Rangoon River for several hours. One of Southeast Asia's most spectacular Buddhist shrines is the golden Shwedogon Pagoda in the heart of Yangon. The golden dome (or *chedi*) is one of the finest in Southeast Asia, and its religious importance is striking: eight hairs of the Buddha are preserved here. Vast amounts of gold have gone into the creation and preservation of the Shwedogon Pagoda; local rulers often gave the monks their weight in gold—or more. Today, the pagoda is a cornerstone of Buddhism, drawing millions of faithful to the site. It also is slowly becoming a tourist attraction as Myanmar's door to the outside world is slightly ajar and foreign visitors are arriving again."

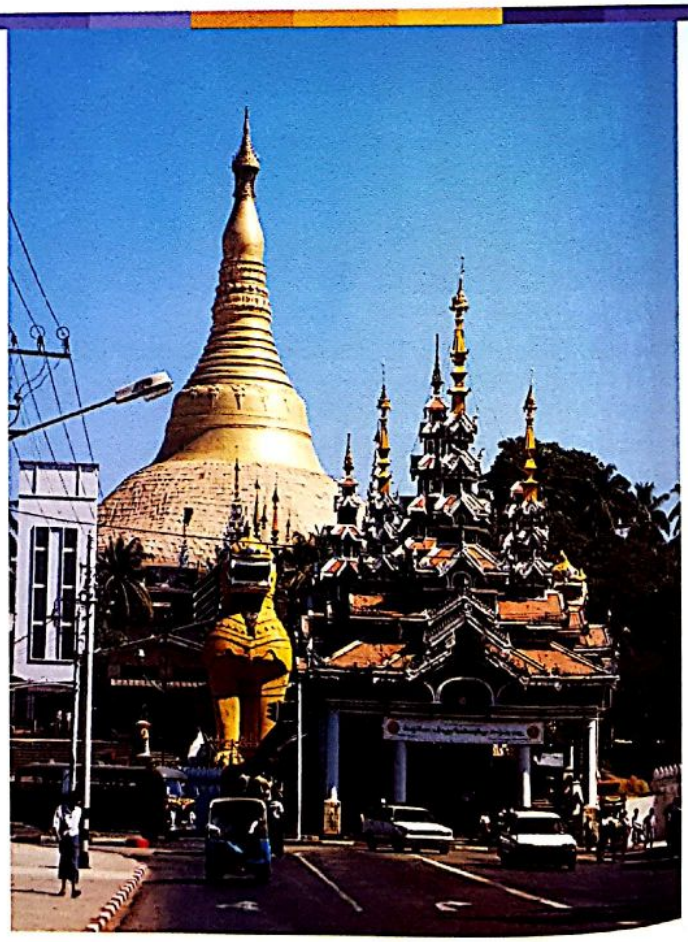

Figure 7.22
Yangon, Myanmar. © H. J. de Blij

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the influences of Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam.

Landscapes of Christianity

The cultural landscapes of Christianity's branches reflect the changes the faith has undergone over the centuries. In medieval Europe the cathedral, church, or monastery was the focus of life. Other buildings clustered around the tower, steeple, and spire of the church that could be seen (and whose bells could be heard) for miles in the surrounding countryside (Fig. 7.23). In the square or plaza in front of the church, crowds gathered for ceremonies and festivals, and the church was always present—even if the event was not primarily religious. Good harvests, military victories, public announcements, and much else took place in the shadow of the symbol of religious authority. During mercantilism and colonialism, Europe exported the ornate architecture of European Christian churches wherever Europeans settled (Fig. 7.24).

The Reformation, the rise of secularism, and the decline of organized religion are reflected in the cultural landscape as well. Many of the ornate churches in the town squares of medieval cities now serve as museums instead of serving active congregations. Other churches in secular regions are closing their doors or significantly reducing the number of religious services offered. Yet, not all of Europe's sacred sites have become secularized. Famous cathedrals continue to hold services while tourists peruse the interior of the vast churches. And other sacred sites of Christianity, such as churches for specific saints, places where significant events occurred, and Vatican City in Rome, are still major pilgrimage sites in Europe. When

Figure 7.23
Bordeaux, France. Built beginning in 1472, Saint Michael's Tower rises over Bordeaux, France, marking the importance of the Catholic Church in Bordeaux's history and culture. © H. J. de Blij.

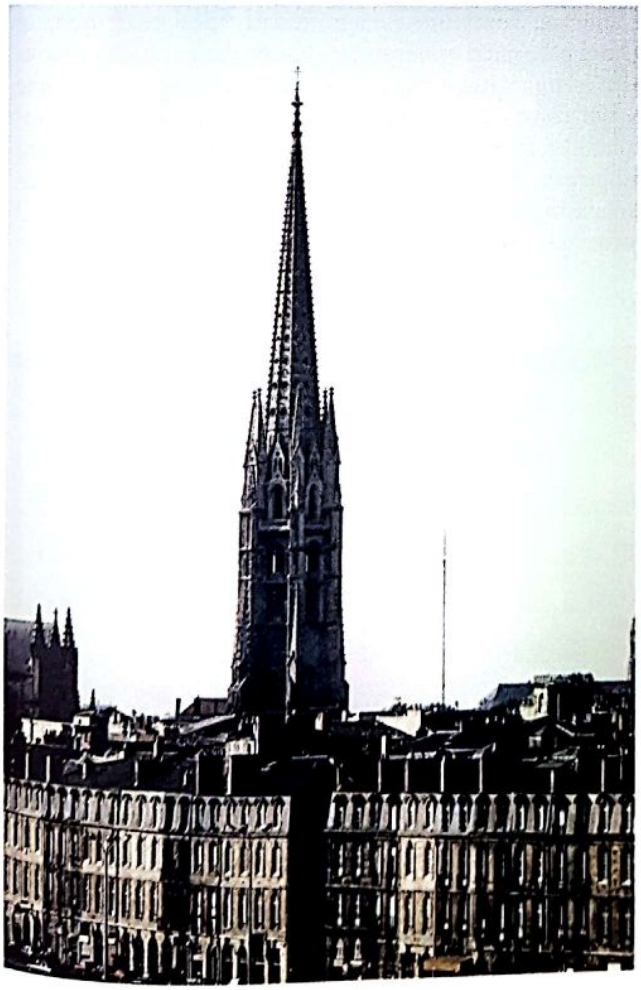
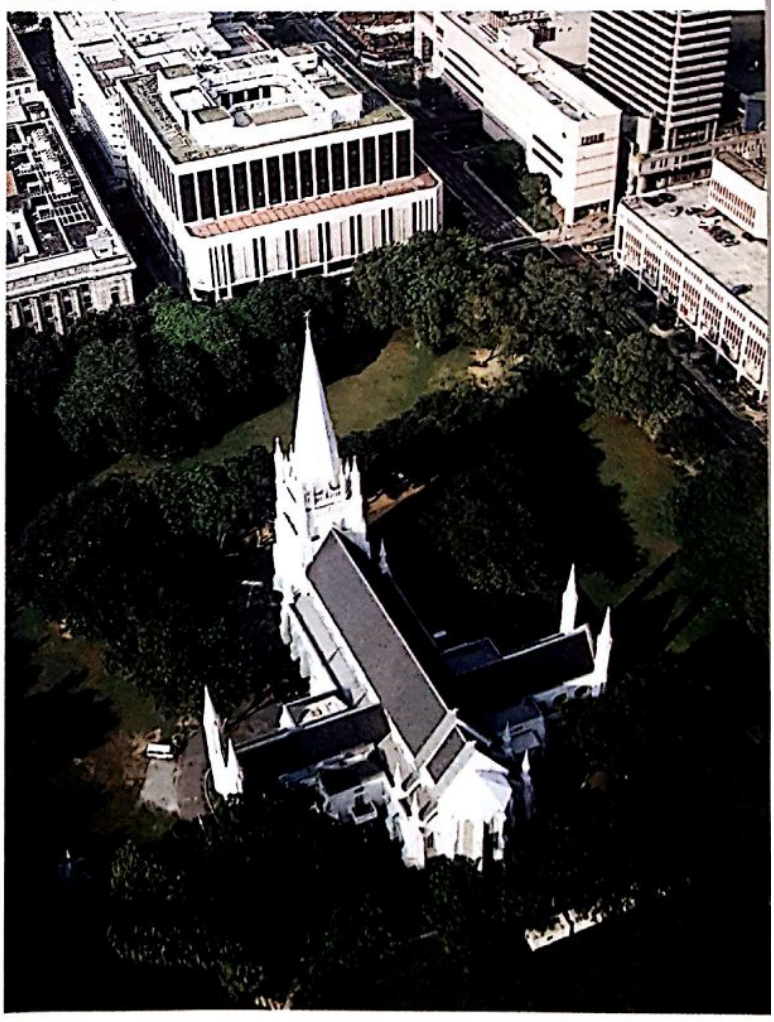


Figure 7.24
Singapore. Built beginning in 1834, Saint Andrew's Cathedral stands on spacious grounds between Singapore's commercial center and hotel district. The church was built by the Church of England and stands in the midst of a city that is predominantly Chinese with Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim minorities. © H. J. de Blij.



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in Rome, the leader of the Catholic Church, the pope, holds an outdoor service for pilgrims to Vatican City, attracting thousands of followers to St. Peter's Square each week (Fig. 7.25).

Cities in Europe are also home to centuries-old Christian cemeteries. Traditionally, Christians bury, rather than cremate, their dead, and in cities, the cemeteries are often crowded with tombstones. Outside of European cities and in North America, Christian cemeteries can resemble large parks. Christian cemeteries often reflect class differences: some graves are marked by simple tombstones, whereas others are elaborate structures. With rising land-use pressures and the associated costs of burial, however, cremation is becoming increasingly common among Christians—particularly in North America and Western Europe.

Religious Landscapes in the United States

The United States, a predominantly Christian country, demonstrates a diversity in religious cultural landscapes, reflecting the variety of landscapes Christianity produces. In *The Cultural Geography of the United States*, geographer Wilbur Zelinsky constructed a map identifying religious regions in the country. Figure 7.26 presents a modified version of Zelinsky's map. The religious regions on the map are familiar to anyone who has even the most general impression of cultural differences in the United States.

The New England region is strongly Catholic; the South's leading denomination is Baptist; the Upper Midwest has large numbers of Lutherans; and the Southwest is predominantly Spanish Catholic. The broad midland region extends from the Middle Atlantic to the Mormon region has a mixture of denominations in which no single church dominates; this is also true of the West. As Figure 7.26 shows, some regions represent local clustering, such as the French Catholic area centered in New Orleans and the mixed denominations of Peninsular Florida, where a large Spanish Catholic cluster has emerged in metropolitan Miami.

More interesting than the simple regionalization of religions in the United States is the variation in cultural landscapes across the regions. The plain white churches of the South and Lutheran Upper Midwest coincide with the Protestant Church's pragmatic spending of church money—not on art and architecture as the Catholic Church historically did (Fig. 7.27). Conversely, many Catholic churches in the United States, both in the Northeast and in Chicago, as well as in other immigrant-magnet cities, were built by immigrants who lived in ethnic neighborhoods. Immigrants spent their own money and used their own building skills to construct more ornate churches and dozens of cathedrals that tied them back to their country of origin and demonstrated their commitment to their faith (Fig. 7.28).

Landscapes of Islam

Elaborate, sometimes magnificently designed mosques whose balconied minarets rise above the townscape dominate Islamic cities, towns, and villages. Often the mosque is the town's most imposing and most carefully maintained building. Five times every day, from the towering **minarets**, the faithful are called to prayer. The sounds emanating from the minarets fill the streets as the faithful converge on the holy place to pray facing Mecca.

Figure 7.25
Vatican City. Pope John Paul II greeted pilgrims at a general audience in St. Peter's Square. Thousands gathered each week to see the pope and hear him greet visitors in multiple languages. © Erin H. Fouberg.

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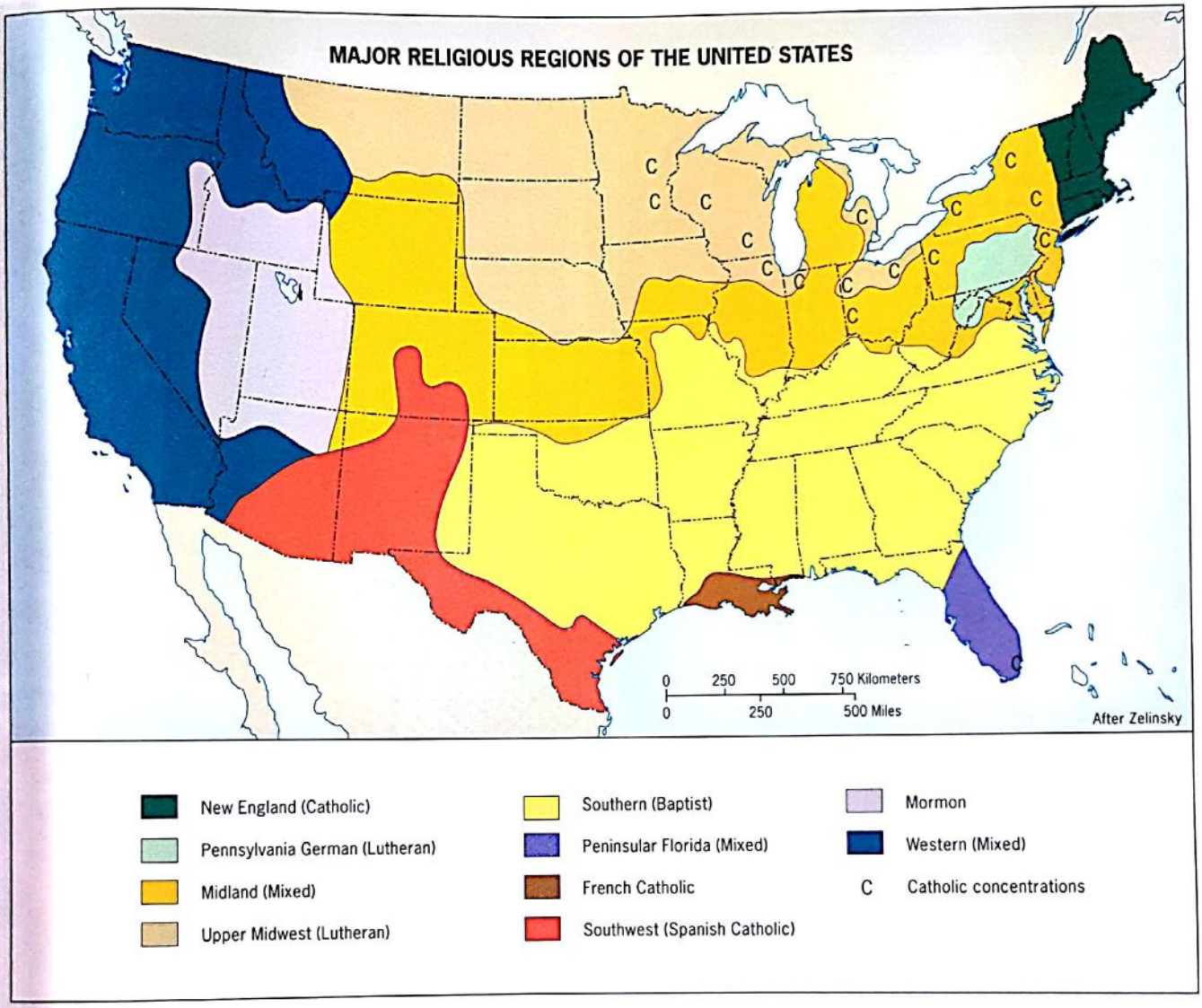

Figure 7.26
Major Religious Regions of the United States. A generalized map of the religious regions of the United States shows concentrations of the major religions. *Adapted with permission from*: W. Zelinsky, *The Cultural Geography of the United States*, revised edition. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992, p. 96.

At the height of Islam's expansion into eastern North Africa and Southern Europe, Muslim architects incorporated earlier Roman models into their designs. The results included some of the world's greatest architectural masterpieces, such as the Alhambra Palace in Granada and the Great Mosque of Cordoba in Spain. Islam's prohibition against depicting the human form led to the wide use of geometric designs and calligraphy—the intricacy of which is truly astounding (Fig. 7.29). During the eleventh century, Muslim builders began glazing the tiles of domes and roofs. To the beautiful arcades and arched courtyards, they added the exquisite beauty of glass-like, perfectly symmetrical cupolas. Muslim architecture represents the unifying concept of Islamic monotheism: the perfection and vastness of the spirit of Allah.

Islam achieved its greatest artistic expression, its most distinctive visible element, in architecture. Even in the smallest town, the community helps build and maintain its mosque. The mosque symbolizes the power of the faith and its role in the community. Its primacy in the cultural landscape confirms the degree to which, in much of the Muslim world, religion and culture are one.

One of the most well-known pilgrimages in the modern world is the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, the **hajj**. One

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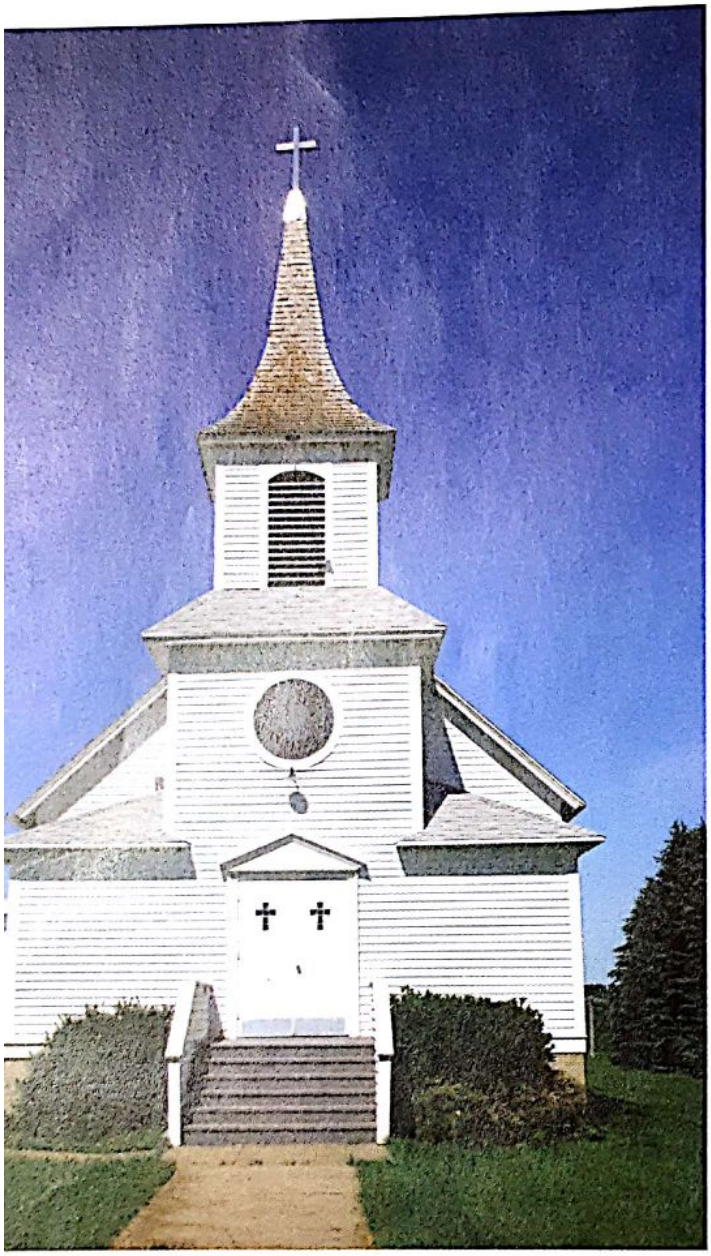

Figure 7.27
Brown County, South Dakota. Scandinavian Lutheran Church was founded by immigrants from Northern Europe. The simple architecture of the church is commonly found in Protestant churches in the Great Plains. © Erin H. Fouberg.

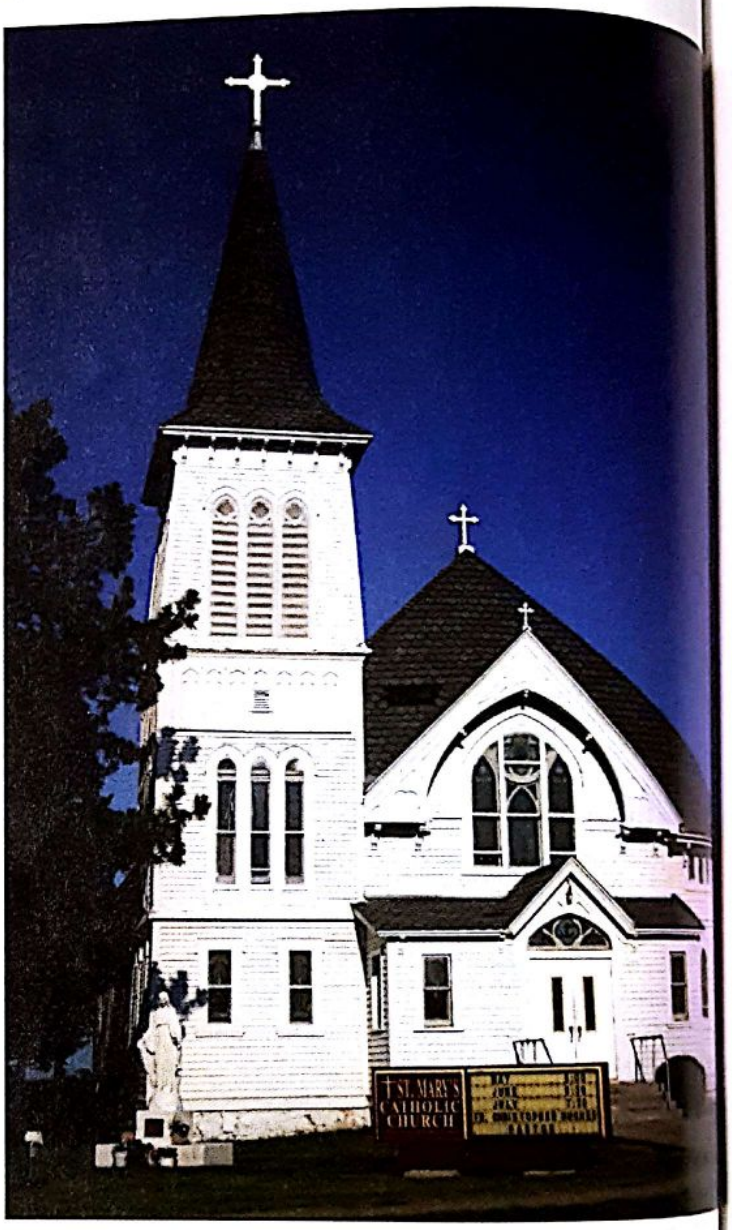

Figure 7.28
Zell, South Dakota. St. Mary's Catholic Church was built by nuns in 1875 to serve Catholic immigrants and American Indians. The more ornate architecture and stained glass of St. Mary's Church are commonly found in Catholic churches in the Great Plains. © Erin H. Fouberg.

of the five pillars of Islam, the hajj requires all Muslims (if financially and physically able) to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during their lifetime. Each year, over 1.3 million Muslims from outside of Saudia Arabia and over 1 million from inside the country make the hajj (Fig. 7.30). The pilgrimage requires the faithful to follow certain steps of reverence in a certain order and within a certain time frame. As a result, the pilgrims move from Mecca through the steps of the hajj en masse. In 2004, over 250 pilgrims were trampled to death as hordes of people followed the steps of the pilgrimage, and in 1990 over 1400 pilgrims were trampled to death. The Saudi government now restricts the number of visas granted each year to Muslims from outside of the country. Yet, the number of pilgrims continues to climb, and the services needed for Muslim pilgrims during the hajj and during the rest of the year now employ four times as many people in Saudi Arabia as the oil industry does. The landscape around Mecca reflects the growing number of pilgrims year round, as towers of apartment buildings and hotels encircle the sacred city.

Geographer Surinder Bhardwaj has studied non-hajj pilgrimages in Islam, which include "visits to sacred shrines of holy men, the graves of saints and Imams, and the tombs of martyrs of the faith." Although some sects of

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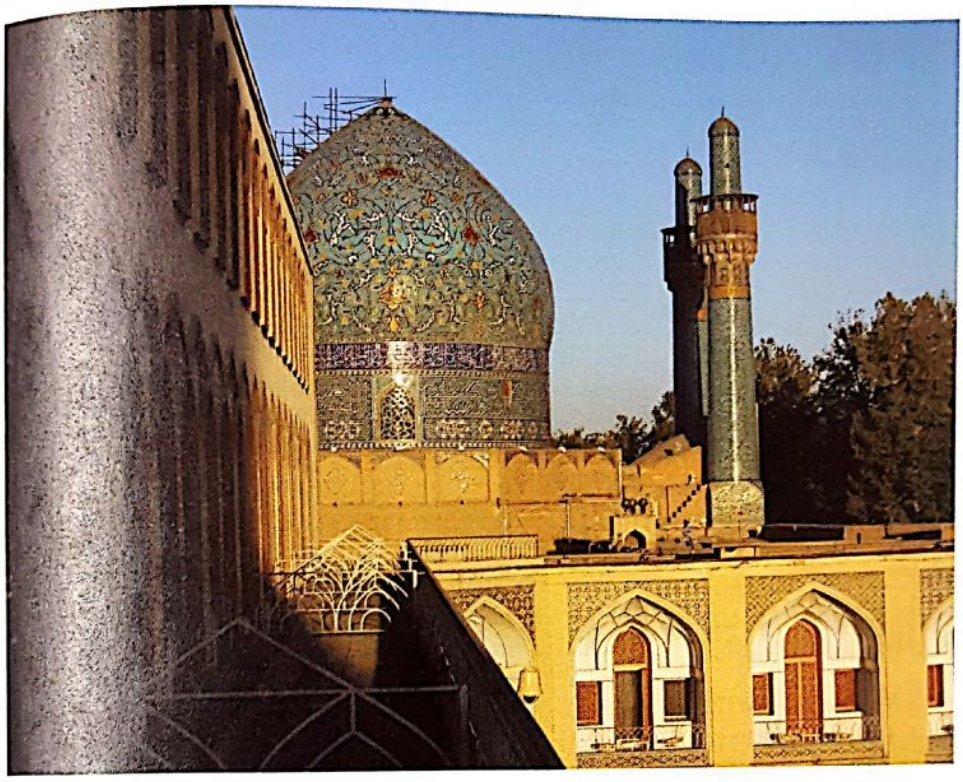

Figure 7.29
Isfahan, Iran. The dome of this mosque demonstrates the geometric art evident in Muslim architecture. © Alexander B. Murphy.

Figure 7.30
Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Pilgrims circle the holy Kaaba in the Grand Mosque in Mecca during the hajj. © AP/Wide World Press.

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Islam see non-hajj pilgrimage as non-Islamic, the *ziarats* (non-hajj pilgrimages) are important to a growing number of Muslims. Bhardwaj points out that the hajj is obligatory but the ziarat is voluntary, and he explains that study of the ziarat helps geographers understand the many variations and regional forms of Islam in the world today. For example, Bhardwaj describes how the ziarat in Indonesia (the country with the largest number of Muslims) reflects the continued influence of pre-Islamic ways. Especially in the interior of Indonesia, Islam has mixed with Buddhism and Hinduism, both of which stress the importance of pilgrimage. Similar to Ireland, where the Catholic Church usurped Celtic sacred sites, Bhardwaj found many sites in Indonesia that were sacred under Hinduism and Buddhism *were* usurped by Islam, which changed the object of pilgrimage from a non-Muslim to Muslim.

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY

Choose a pilgrimage site, such as Mecca, Vatican City, or the Western Wall, and describe how the act of pilgrimage (in some cases by millions) alters this place's cultural landscape and environment.

WHAT ROLE DOES RELIGION PLAY IN POLITICAL CONFLICTS?

Religious beliefs and histories can bitterly divide peoples who speak the same language, have the same ethnic background, and make their living in similar ways. Such divisions arise not only between people adhering to different major religions (as with Muslims and Christians in the former Yugoslavia) but also among adherents of the same religion. Some of the most destructive conflicts have pitted Christian against Christian and Muslim against Muslim.

Religious conflicts usually involve more than differences in spiritual practices and beliefs. Religion often functions as a symbol of a wider set of cultural and political differences. The "religious" conflict in Northern Ireland is not just about different views of Christianity, and the conflict between Hindus and Sikhs in India has a strong political as well as religious dimension. Nevertheless, in these and other cases religion serves as the principal symbol around which conflict is organized.

Conflicts along Religious Borders

A comparison between Figure 7.6 and a political map of the world (see Fig. 8.3) reveals that some countries lie entirely within the realms of individual world religions, whereas other countries straddle **interfaith boundaries**, the boundaries between the world's major faiths. Many countries that lie astride interfaith boundaries are subject to potentially divisive cultural forces—particularly when the people see their religious differences as a source of social division within their country. This is the case in several countries in Africa that straddle the Christian-Muslim interfaith boundary (Fig. 7.31). Other countries with major religious disputes straddle **intrafaith boundaries**, the boundaries within a single major faith. Intrafaith boundaries include divisions between Christian Protestants and Catholics, divisions between Muslim Sunni and Shi'ite, and the like. This is the case in Northern Ireland, where Protestants and Catholics, who both worship in the Christian tradition, are divided in conflict.

Interfaith and intrafaith boundaries can be peaceful, or they can spur enormously violent political conflict. Israel/Palestine, the Horn of Africa, and the former Yugoslavia provide examples of interfaith conflicts, and Northern Ireland is an example of an intrafaith conflict. In each case, religious difference is not the only factor, but it certainly plays an important symbolic and perceptual role.

Israel and Palestine

Earlier in this chapter, we discussed the history of the conflict over the sacred space of Jerusalem. The region of Israel and Palestine is home to one of the most contentious religious conflicts in the world today. In the aftermath of World War I, European colonialism came to a region that had previously been controlled and fought over by the Jews, Romans, Christians, Muslims, and Ottomans. A newly formed League of Nations (a precursor to the United Nations) recognized British control of the land, calling the territorial mandate Palestine. At that point, the vast majority of people living in the land were Muslim Palestinians. The goal of the British government was to meet Zionist goals and to create, in Palestine, a national homeland for the Jewish people (who had already begun to migrate to the area). The British explicitly assured the world that the religious and civil rights of existing non-Jewish peoples in Palestine would be protected. The British policy did not produce a peaceful result, however. Civil disturbances erupted almost immediately, and, by 1947–1948, Jews and Palestinians engaged in open warfare.

In the wake of World War II and the Holocaust, many more Jews moved to the region. Shortly after the war, the British mandate ended, and the newly formed United Nations voted to partition Palestine—creating independent Israeli and Palestinian states. From the drawing of the first map, the partitioning plan was set for failure (see Fig. 3.11). Palestinians and Israelis were to

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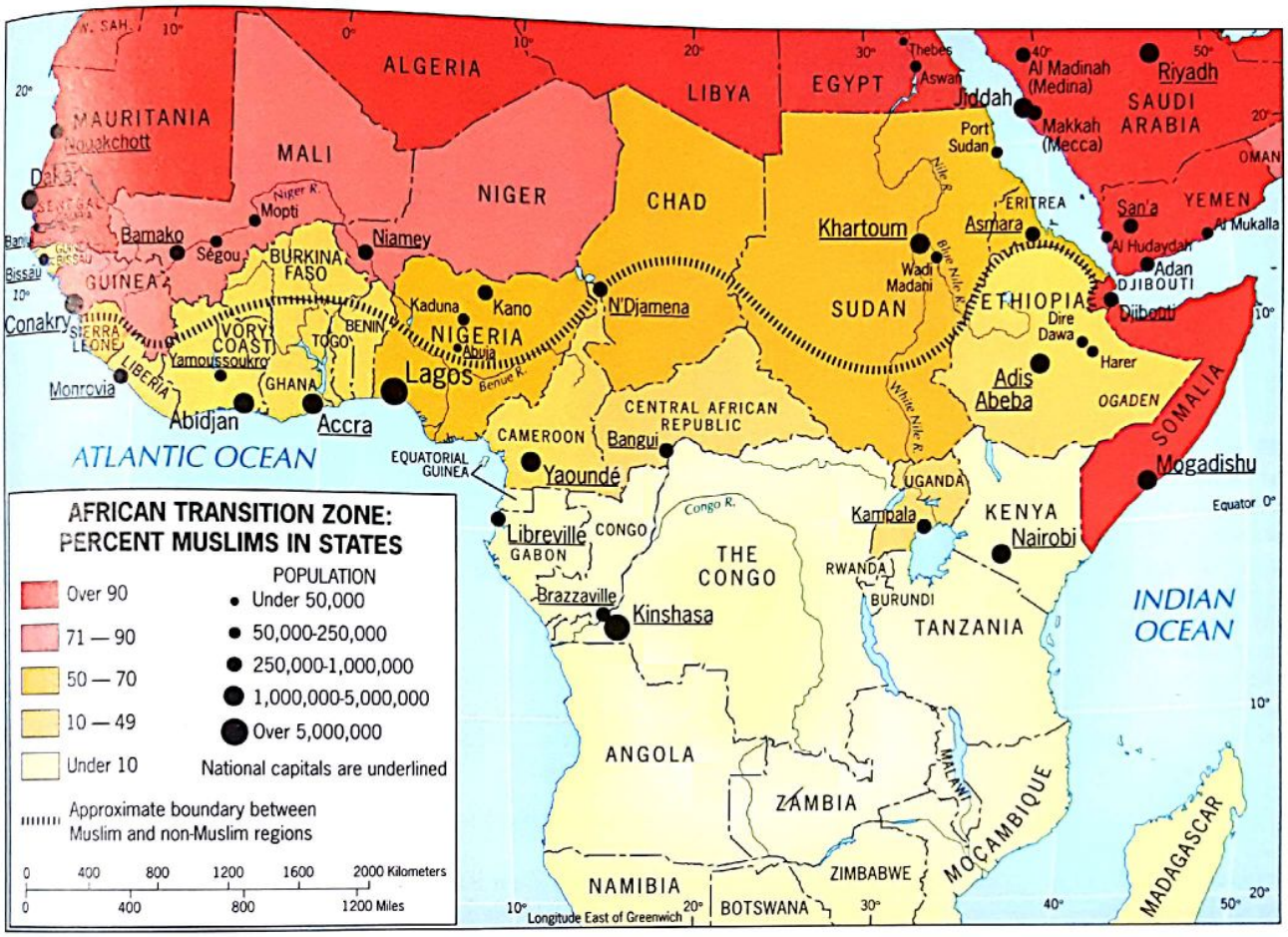

Figure 7.31
African Transition Zone. Percent Muslim by State. H. J. de Blij, P. O. Muller, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

live in noncontiguous states. Surrounding Arab states reacted violently against the new Jewish state. Israel survived through numerous wars in which Palestinians lost their lands, farms, and villages. As a consequence of war and the consolidation of the Israeli state, Palestinians migrated or fled to refugee camps in neighboring Arab states.

In the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Israel gained control of the Palestinian lands in Gaza, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. The international community calls these lands the Occupied Territories. The Jewish presence in Gaza has always been small. But over the last three decades, the Israelis built Jewish housing settlements throughout the West Bank and have expanded the city of Jerusalem eastward into the West Bank (razing Palestinian houses along the way) to gain more control of territory. The Israeli government severely restricts new building by Palestinians, even on lands in the Palestinian zones of the West Bank. Events in the early and mid-1990s began to change this religious-political mosaic as self-government was awarded to Gaza and to small areas inside the West Bank. Palestinian Arabs were empowered to run their own affairs within these zones. Stability and satisfactory coexistence could lead to further adjustments, some thought—and eventually a full-fledged Palestinian state. In 1995, the parties hammered out a peace accord that would have created a substantial Palestinian state. In 2000, Palestine rejected the peace terms and the Oslo framework, which many saw as the best chance for peace in the region.

In September 2005, the Israeli government shifted their settlement policy in the Gaza Strip. Israel evacuated the settlements they had built in Gaza and then burned down the buildings that remained (Fig. 7.32). The Palestinians living on the Gaza Strip experienced an immediate jubilation of freedom—visiting the beaches that were previously open only to Israeli settlers and traveling across the border into Egypt to purchase goods. Within days, the border with Egypt was closed and the Israeli government continued to build a security fence around the Gaza Strip to keep Palestinians in the territory. Although Palestinians now have greater freedom within

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Figure 7.32
Kfar Darom, Gaza Strip. The Israeli Army withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005, after occupying the territory for 38 years. At the Kfar Darom Jewish settlement, the Israeli Army destroyed its own liaison offices as they retreated from the Gaza Strip on September 11, 2005. © AP/Wide World Photos.

the Gaza Strip, the Israeli government tightly controls the flow of Palestinians and goods into and out of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, thereby suppressing interaction between the Palestinian territories.

Palestinians continue to fight a war against the Israelis—with terrorism. Palestinian attacks against Israelis threaten the everyday lives of the Israeli people; no bus, coffee shop, restaurant, or sidewalk is safe from the threat of terrorist attack. Similarly, in the aftermath of a terrorist attack, the Israeli military hunts the suspects, shedding blood in Palestinian neighborhoods.

The situation in Israel and Palestine today does not reflect a simple interfaith boundary. The tiny region has a multitude of interfaith boundaries, especially in the West Bank (Fig. 7.33). The settlements in the West Bank, put many miles of interfaith boundaries within that one country's jurisdiction.

The Economist recently summed up the prospects for peace in the region, saying that despite some signs that violence by both sides is abating, "there is not a flicker of hope, in the short run, that even a truce is in the offing." At the same time, Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip, the government was erecting a new security fence in the West Bank, and was building new Israeli housing in the West Bank. In 2005, *The Economist* explained that an Israeli human-rights group, B'Tselem, argued the new security fence will "still separate many Palestinians (particularly around Jerusalem) from their farmland and cut deep into the West Bank around the main Israeli settlements—in effect joining them to Israel proper while nearly dividing any future Palestinian state into enclaves."

The conflict over the small territory of the Holy Land is amplified by the sentiment of both Israelis and Palestinians that they have divine right to the land; by the violence inflicted on each other by both sides; and by, as Stoddard and Prorok put it, the belief and emotional conviction by both parties that the "territory belongs to them."

The Horn of Africa

The religions in the Horn of Africa include Islam, ancient Christian sects, and Christian sects of European colonizers (Fig. 7.34). Over the last 2000 years, the small country of Eritrea, on the Red Sea coast, has changed hands a multitude of times. Along with diversity in religion, this region, like the rest of Africa, incorporates a very high level of linguistic diversity.

At the heart of the Horn of Africa lies mountainous Ethiopia, the cultural core area of Amharic (Coptic) Christians. For centuries, the Amharics in the mountains of Ethiopia used their nearly impregnable natural fortress to control the lowlands beyond the borders of what is today Ethiopia. As Islam diffused into North Africa, Muslims converted some adherents people at the base of

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Figure 7.33
The West Bank. *Adapted with permission from*: C. B. Williams and C. T. Elsworth, *The New York Times*, November 17, 1995, p. A6. © The New York Times.

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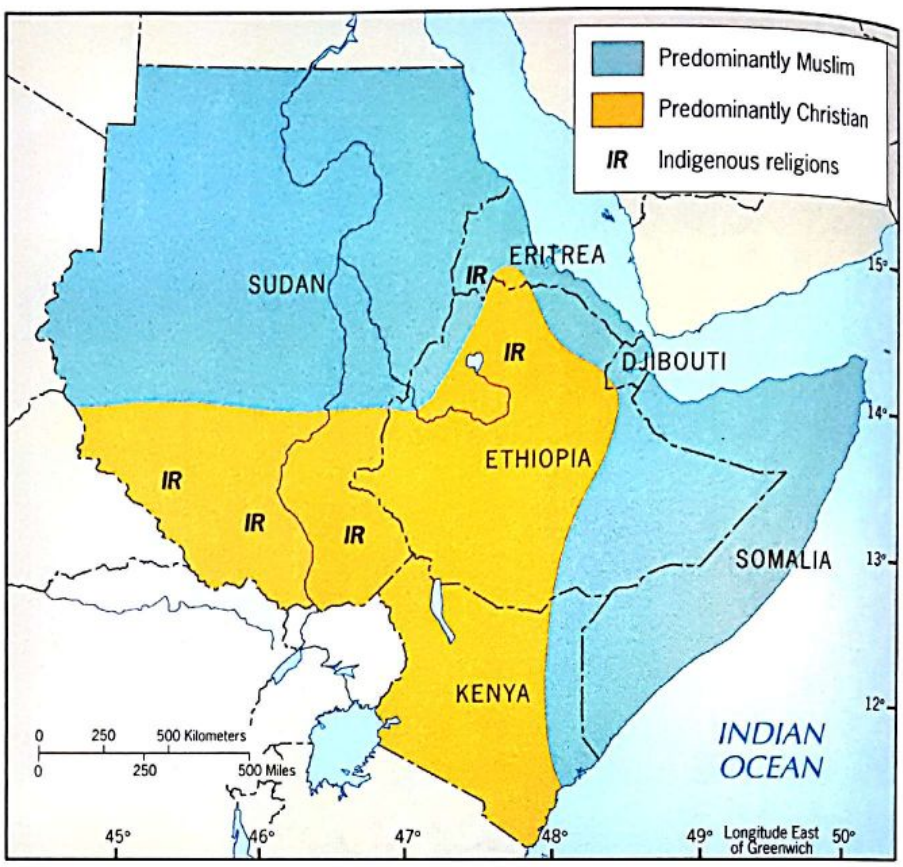

Figure 7.34
Religious Regions in the Horn of Africa. *Data from:* United States Department of State, International Report on Religious Freedom, 2004.

the mountains, but the Amharic rulers maintained control of most of the region. Islam surrounded the Amharics to the north, northeast, and southeast.

During the 1600s, the Ottoman (Muslim) Empire extended into the Horn of Africa, but the Amharics remained. With the coming of European colonialism to Africa, in the late 1800s to early 1900s, Italy took Eritrea as a colony. After World War II, Great Britain controlled the region, and in 1950, the United Nations decided it was best for Eritrea to become part of Ethiopia. The marriage was not one of consent, and the Muslim Eritreans did not easily accept control by the Amharic Ethiopians. The Amharic rulers controlled not only the Muslim Eritreans in the north, but also the Muslim Somalis in the east, together with a huge arc-shaped region of traditional and other sects of Christianity to the west and south. The Amharics continued to control these areas, even after the kingdom of Ethiopia was overthrown by a military dictatorship. The Eritreans' war for independence stretched across this regime change, lasting 30 years, and finally ended in 1991 with the Eritreans reaching their goal of independence.

Eritrea's secession did not end Ethiopia's religious multiculturalism. Ethiopia still contains a large Muslim population of Somalis in its eastern zone; the south and west are non-Muslim; and Amharic Christians still cluster in their highland domain. The separation of Eritrea is likely to be only one step in a series of changes that underscore the perils of straddling an interfaith border.

The Former Yugoslavia

No discussion of the impact of interfaith boundaries is complete without a discussion of the former Yugoslavia. A number of religious and linguistic fault lines run through the Balkan Peninsula. We discussed one of the fault lines earlier in the chapter when we looked at the fall of the Roman Empire and the division in the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. The dividing line between the two Christian sects runs right through the Balkan Peninsula. The Slovenians and Croats in the west of the peninsula are Catholic, and the Serbians and Montenegrans in the east and south of the peninsula are Eastern Orthodox.

The Balkan Peninsula is also a dividing line for language in Europe, with people west of the line using the Roman alphabet and people east of the line using the Cyrillic alphabet. The Serbo-Croatian language is now recognized as two languages, Serbian and Croatian. Even when these mutually intellible languages were recognized as a single language, the Croats used the Roman alphabet to write the language, and the Serbs used the Cyrillic alphabet to write it.

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These divisions in religion and language were complicated by the entry of another universalizing religion during the 1300s. The Ottoman Turks, a Muslim empire, brought soldiers to their northwestern military frontier and converted some Serbian communities to Islam. The Ottomans took control of the region by force, beginning with the bloody battle of Kosovo in 1389, which was the Serbian homeland during the European Middle Ages. From that point on, the region has had pockets of Muslims in the middle and south of the peninsula, creating numerous interfaith boundaries. Even by the early 1990s, the clusters of Muslims on the peninsula were quite large, in terms of both territory and population. Muslims had a strong presence in Bosnia and in its capital, Sarajevo, as well as in Kosovo and Macedonia.

Yugoslavia is another example of a country thrown together and left wrestling with significant diversity. The name "Yugoslavia" means land of the South Slavs. The country was formed in the chaotic aftermath of World War I before 1920. When World War II began, many Serbs already resented the Muslim presence in the region, harking back to the time when the Ottomans defeated the Serbs. During World War II, the Croats, who supported the German Nazis, fought the anti-Nazi Serbs. Croats, with the might of the Nazis behind them, committed acts of **genocide** (attempts to destroy a certain ethnic group by deliberately killing members of the ethnic group) against Serbs, who lived in Croatia and Bosnia during the war. After 1945, Yugoslavia came under the control of a communist dictator, Josip Broz Tito. For decades, Tito ran Yugoslavia as a centralized country with six republics. During his reign, he stopped nationalist movements in Croatia and among Muslim Albanians in Kosovo. Tito never healed the ethnic divides in Yugoslavia; he simply pushed them out of view during his control. After his death in 1980, Serbian nationalist leader Slobodan Milosevic ruled for the benefit of Serbs until Yugoslavia was swept up in the winds of change produced by the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. Slovenia was the first republic to declare its independence from the rest of the country, followed closely behind by Croatia and Bosnia.

Serbia, led by Milosevic, tried to force the republics to stay in Yugoslavia. The multiethnic republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was caught in the middle when war broke out between the Croats and Serbs (Fig. 7.35). The Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina were soon attacked by both camps. The term **ethnic cleansing** came into use to describe the ouster of Bosnian Muslims and others from their homes and lands—and sometimes their slaughter. Serbs and Croats also sought to "cleanse" each other's territories. In the midst of war, the Croats and Muslims formed a coalition to fight against the Serbs. More than 2.5 million Bosnians were driven from their homes, and hundreds of thousands were injured or killed. Atrocities became so rampant that other countries agreed to form a war crimes tribunal while the war was ongoing.

The international community belatedly became involved, and a partition plan was put in place. New countries joined the United Nations: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The plan divided Bosnia and Herzegovina into two republics: one for Croats and Muslims and one for Serbs. The future of Bosnia and Herzegovina is quite uncertain. The central government has little power, and the wounds of war are still raw. The long line dividing the two republics was secured by 60,000 NATO peacekeepers from Europe and the United States, but oversight has now been transferred to a European Union force (Fig. 7.36).

During the second half of the 1990s, a group of ethnically Albanian Muslims in Kosovo (a region in southwestern Serbia) demanded autonomy. The Serbian leadership responded with a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Kosovo Albanians in 1999. They razed whole villages, drove out people in great numbers, and killed many. The international community was once again slow to intervene. This time the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), led by the United States, initiated a bombing campaign against Serbia that brought hostilities to a halt and paved the way for the introduction of a peacekeeping force.

More recently, the defeat of Slobodan Milosevic—the Serbian leader who was behind the ethnic cleansing campaigns in Bosnia and Kosovo—has raised hopes that stability will return to the Balkan Peninsula. Yet the situation in both Bosnia and Kosovo remains fragile, a reflection of how difficult it is to rebuild trust among communities under such circumstances.

Northern Ireland

A number of Western European countries, as well as Canada and the United States, have large Catholic communities and large Protestant communities, and often these are reflected in the regional distribution of the population. In most places, the split between these two sects of Christianity creates little if any rift today. The most notable exception is Northern Ireland.

Today Northern Ireland and Great Britian (which includes England, Scotland, and Wales) form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the UK). This was not always the case. For centuries, the island of Ireland was its own entity, marked by a mixture of Celtic religious practices and Roman Catholicism. During the 1300s, the English began to infiltrate the island of Ireland, taking control of its agricultural economy, and by 1700, they controlled the entire island as a colony. During the 1800s, the Irish colony produced industrial wealth for Britain in the shipyards of the north.

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Figure 7.35

The Former Yugoslavia. This map shows the generalized distribution of ethnic groups in Yugoslavia before the war. *Adapted with permission from*: Office of the Geographer of the United States Department of State, Washington, D.C., 1991.

Protestants from the island of Great Britain (primarily Scotland) migrated to Ireland during the 1600s and 1700s to control the farms. During the 1700s, Protestants migrated particularly to northern Ireland to take advantage of the political and economic power granted to them in the colony. During the 1800s, migrants were drawn to northeastern Ireland where industrial jobs and opportunities were greatest. During the colonial period, the British treated the Irish Catholics harshly, taking away their lands, depriving them of their legal right to own property or participate in government, and regarding them as second-class citizens.

In the late 1800s, Irish Catholics began reinvigorating their Celtic and Irish traditions; this strengthening of their identity fortified their resolve against the British. In the early 1900s, the Catholic Irish rebelled against British colonialism. In 1922, Britain partitioned Ireland to protect the Protestants in the northeast. Twenty-six counties formed

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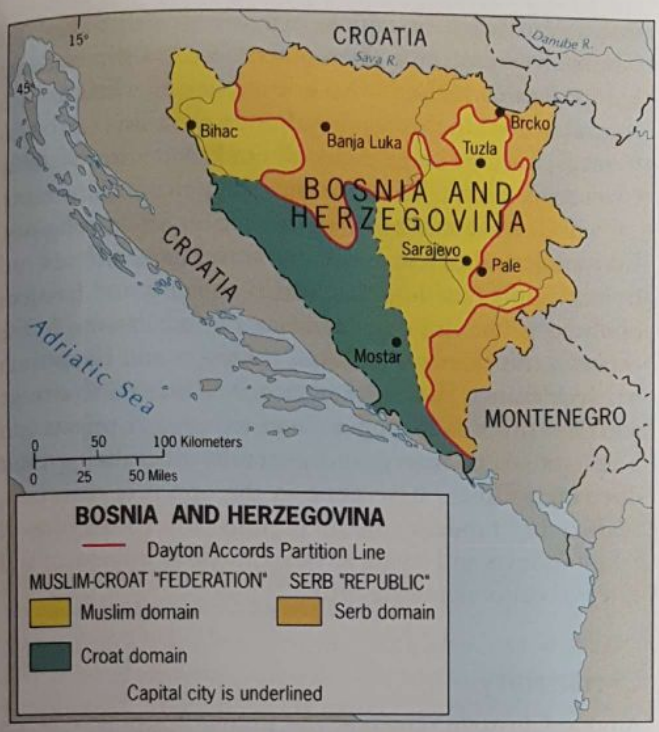

Figure 7.36
Bosnia and Herzegovina. The map shows the Muslim-Croat Federation, the Serb Republic, and the Dayton Accord partition line. H. J. de Blij, A. B. Murphy, E. H. Fouberg, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

the Republic of Ireland, with a vast Irish Catholic majority. And the six counties of the north voted to form Northern Ireland, which became part of the United Kingdom. The six counties that compose Northern Ireland are home to both Catholics and Protestants (Fig. 7.37). The substantial Catholic minority in Northern Ireland felt unprotected as part of the United Kingdom.

The Protestant majority in Northern Ireland, constituting about two-thirds of the total population (about 1.6 million), possessed most of the economic and political advantages. As time went on, economic stagnation worsened the situation. Charges of discrimination and repression of Catholics were underscored by Irish Republican Army (IRA) terrorist acts, bringing British troops into the area in 1968. Although the Republic of Ireland was sensitive to the plight of Catholics in the North, no official help was extended to those who were engaging in violence.

Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland segregated their lives and homes from one another. The cultural landscape marks the religious conflict, as each group clusters in its own neighborhoods and celebrates either important Catholic or Protestant dates (see Fig. 6.11). Geographer Frederick Boal wrote a seminal work in 1969 on the Northern Irish in one area of Belfast. Boal used fieldwork to mark Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods on a map, and he interviewed over 400 Protestants and Catholics in their homes. Boal used the concept of **activity**

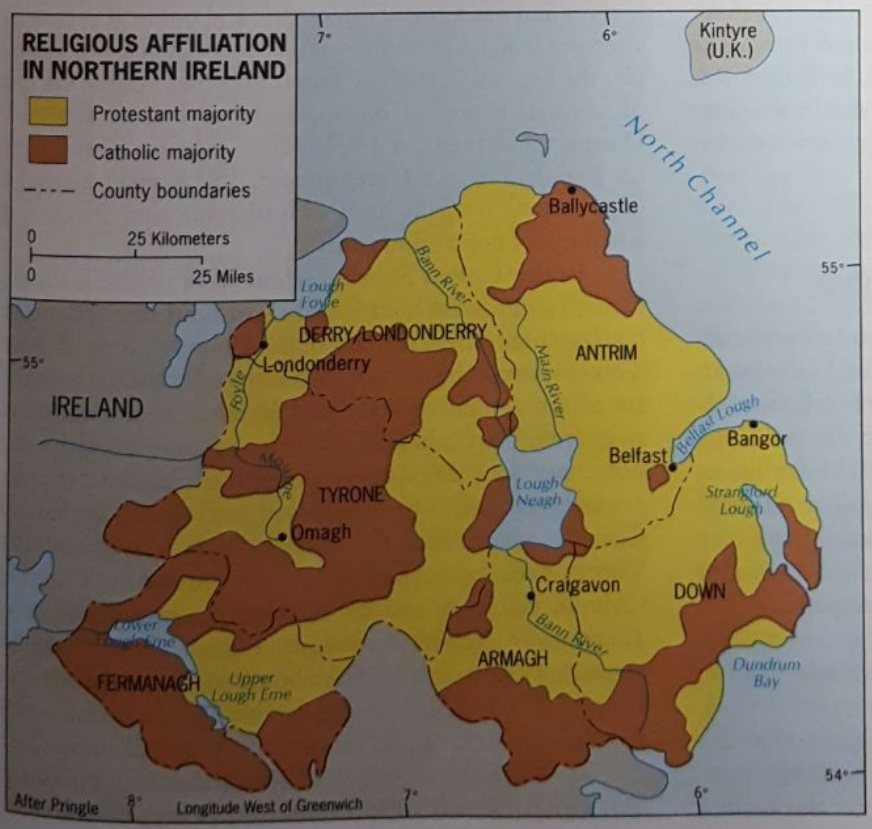

Figure 7.37
Religious Affiliation in Northern Ireland. Areas of Catholic and Protestant majorities are scattered throughout Northern Ireland. *Adapted with permission from*: D. G. Pringle, *One Island, Two Nations?* Letchworth: Research Studies Press/Wiley, 1985, p. 21.

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space to demonstrate how Protestants and Catholics had each chosen to separate themselves in their rounds of daily activity. Boal found that each group traveled longer distances to shop in grocery stores tagged as their respective religion, walked further to catch a bus in a neighborhood belonging to their own religion, gave their neighborhood different toponyms, read different newspapers, and cheered for different football (soccer) teams. Boal updated his studies in the 1980s and 1990s and found that the segregation between the two groups was intensifying.

The ongoing conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland makes little sense to either Protestants or Catholics who live outside of this region in peace. Although religion is the tag-line by which we refer to the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the conflict is much more about economics, oppression, access to opportunities, terror, civil rights, and political influence. But religion and religious history are the banners beneath which the opposing sides march, and church and cathedral have become symbols of strife rather than peace.

An Anglo-Irish peace agreement, adopted in April 1998, raised hopes of a new period of peace in Northern Ireland. Yet the future of the accord hangs in the balance, with threats to the accord continuing to emerge (in large part on decommissioning weapons). For the conflict in Northern Ireland to end, religious affiliation cannot be the sole or primary focus of identity. The Catholic population (with a higher birth rate) is now slightly larger than the Protestant population in Northern Ireland. Recent studies by Irish geographer Frederick Boal give hope for a resolution in future generations. Boal found that religious identities were lessening in intensity among the younger generation and among the more educated. In Belfast, the major city in Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants are now intermixing in spaces such as downtown clubs, shopping centers, and college campuses.

Religious Fundamentalism and Extremism

Today, throughout the world, religious leaders and millions of their followers are seeking to return to the basics of their faith. The drive toward **religious fundamentalism** is often born out of frustration over the perceived breakdown of society's mores and values, lack of religious authority, failure to achieve economic goals, loss of a sense of local control, or a sense of violation of a religion's core territory. Regardless of the religion, a fundamentalist group holds its religious beliefs as nonnegotiable and uncompromisable.

People in one society often fear fundamentalism in other societies without recognizing it in their own. In fact, what many call fundamentalism is better defined as extremism. **Religious extremism** is fundamentalism carried to the point of violence. The attacks on the United States in September 2001 reinforced the tendency of many Americans to equate extremism with Islam. Yet Christian extremism is also a potent force, as witnesses the U.S. religious zealots' who kill physicians who perform legal abortions in this country. Fundamentalists can be extremists, but by no means are all fundamentalists, whether Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or any other religion, extremists.

Today the forces of globalization affect religions. Education, radio, television, and travel have diffused notions of individual liberties, sexual equality, and freedom of choice—but also consumerism and secularism. In the process, the extent of cultural diffusion and innovation has accelerated. Some churches have managed to change with the times, allowing women to serve as priests and homosexuals to marry, and generally liberalizing their doctrines. Others have gone in the opposite direction, reaffirming fundamental or literalist interpretations of religious texts and trying to block modern influences and external cultural interference.

Christianity

Among Christian religions, the Roman Catholic Church has most resisted innovations deemed incompatible with the fundamentals of the faith. Among the issues giving rise to disputes are birth control, family planning, and the role of women in the religious bureaucracy. The major religions tend to be male-dominated, and few women have managed to enter the hierarchy. This is true in the Roman Catholic Church, where women are not allowed to serve as priests. The Roman Catholic Church has over 1 billion adherents and has a global diplomatic and political presence, affecting policies in numerous places and fields. For example, the Roman Catholic Church preaches against the use of artificial means of birth control as well as abortion. During the September 1994 United Nations Conference on Population and Development, the Roman Catholic Church sought to ally itself with Islamic countries against advocates of population control.

In the United States, certain sects of the Catholic Church continue to hold Mass in Latin and are much more fundamentalist than the rest of the Church. Some of these sects are part of the Catholic Church and continue to operate within the purview of the Church. Other sects stand apart from the Catholic Church and do not recognize the pope, nor does the Vatican sanction them. For example, actor/director Mel Gibson belongs to the Holy Family Church, which does not recognize the pope, and the Vatican does not recognize them as part of the Catholic Church. Gibson's church is most associated with the *Traditionalist Catholic Movement*, a fundamentalist movement that believes the Mass should still be conducted in Latin and that modern popes and clergy are not following the traditional theology and practices of the Church.

In the United States, Christian fundamentalism is also associated with Protestant faiths. Preaching a doctrine of strict adherence to the literal precepts of the

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Bible, many Protestant Christian fundamentalists believe that the entire character of contemporary society needs to be brought into alignment with biblical principles. Fundamentalist Protestant churches range from tiny churches to enormous warehouse-style churches with thousands of members. Regardless of the size of the congregation, fundamentalist Protestant churches have become increasingly active in political and social arenas—arguing for prayer in public schools, the teaching of "creationism" in science courses, a strict ban on abortion, and the adoption of laws outlawing homosexual liaisons. In the process, they have gained considerable influence, especially in local politics (school boards and city councils).

Judaism

Like all other major religions, Judaism has fundamentalist sects. The most fundamentalist of the three major sects of Judaism is Orthodox. Yet, the Orthodox sect is divided into several different schools of thought, teachings, and synagogues. Much diversity exists among Orthodox Jews, with varying policies on Israel, education, and interaction with non-Orthodox Jews. Fundamentalist Jews who have migrated to Israel vote for more conservative candidates in Israeli elections, affecting election outcomes. Similarly, some fundamentalist Jews who remain in Europe or North America send money to certain politicians in Israel in support of policies such as Israeli settlements on the West Bank.

Judaism also has its extremist element, people whom the majority of Jews denounce and whom the government of Israel has even banned from the country. Among the Jewish extremist groups is the Kach and Kahane Chai—followers of the late American-born, Israeli Rabbi Meir Kahane. Rabbi Kahane espoused anti-Arabism in his teachings, and his followers (Kahane Chai) continue to do so. Members of Kach or Kahane Chai are suspected in several terrorist acts in Isreal.

Islam

Other major faiths must also confront the pressures of change. Not all Muslim communities, for example, adhere precisely to the rules of the Qu'ran prohibiting the use of alcohol. The laws of Islam, which are very strict when interpreted literally, are not applied with equal force throughout the Muslim world. Such inconsistency, along with concerns over external influence, produces a reaction, not only in the religious bureaucracies but also among many believers.

One sign of the growth of Islamic fundamentalism is the expansion of Islam's **Shari'a laws**. Shari'a laws, especially the criminal code, are harsh, prescribing, for instance, the amputation of hands or limbs for theft. Northern Nigeria and northern Sudan both impose shari'a laws in their criminal courts. In Malaysia, Chinese and other non-Muslim minorities reacted fearfully when the government considered demands for the general application of shari'a law. In Indonesia, a fundamentalist drive by Islamic preachers has found fertile soil, especially among rural people who remain remote from the changes affecting Indonesian society elsewhere.

As with Christian fundamentalism, countering Muslim fundamentalism entails political risks. When the former Shah of Iran tried to limit the power of the imams as he sought to integrate the state into the wider global economy, he provoked a religious movement that contributed to his overthrow. (His overthrow in 1979 was also tied to the autocratic regime he headed, which fostered much opposition.) During the revolution in Iran, the imams imposed the most basic of Shi'ite religious rules and practices upon their followers. After the Shah was replaced by an ayatollah, a supreme religious leader, those rules and practices became law. Women, who had acquired greater freedoms under the Shah's regime, faced new restrictions. The government arrested women who had adopted Western modes of dress and required them to wear hijab, veils, and long robes. Many lost positions in commerce and administration, and their political influence declined.

What happened in Iran during the 1970s and 1980s was one of the significant early manifestations of the trend toward fundamentalism. The process has, if anything, accelerated since then. Afghanistan under the Taliban provided a particularly striking example. The Taliban regime seized control of much of the country during the 1990s and asserted the strictest fundamentalist regime in the contemporary world. The leadership imposed a wide range of religious restrictions, sought to destroy all statues depicting human forms, required followers of Hinduism to wear identifying markers, and forbade women to appear in public with their head exposed.

The Taliban in Afghanistan also provided a haven for the activities of Islamic extremists who sought to promote an Islamic holy war, or **jihad**, against the West in general and the United States in particular. One of the key figures in the Islamic extremist movement of the past decade, Osama bin Laden, helped finance and mastermind a variety of terrorist activities conducted against the United States, including the destruction of the World Trade Towers, the attack on the Pentagon, and the downing of Flight 93 on September 11, 2001 (Fig. 7.38). Bin Laden and his followers are a product of a revolutionary Islamic movement that now sees the United States as a great enemy and one that Muslims must oppose. The beliefs of bin Laden and his associates are certainly not representative of Islam as a whole, but they are religious beliefs. Indeed, they can be traced to a form of Islam, known as *Wahhabi Islam*, which developed in the eighteenth century in opposition to what was seen as sacrilegious practices on the part of Ottoman rulers. The champions of the opposition movement called for a return to a purportedingly pure variant of Islam from centuries

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Figure 7.38
New York, New York. On September 11, 2001, with the north tower of the World Trade Center already burning, hijacked United Airlines flight 175 flew toward the south tower of the World Trade Center. © CNN via Getty Images News and Sport Services.

earlier. The Saudi Arabian state is the hearth of Wahhabi Islam today, as the Saudi Royal family has championed Wahhabi Islam since the 1800s.

A variety of forces have fueled the violent path on which the extremist movement has embarked, but some of these forces are unambiguously geographic. Perhaps the most important is the widely held view among movement followers that "infidels" have invaded the Islamic holy land over the past 80 years. Of particular concern to Islamic extremists are the presence of American military and business interests in the Arabian Peninsula, the establishment of the state of Israel, and the support European and American governments have given Israel. A principal goal of the extremist movement is to bring an end to what are seen as improper territorial incursions. A second geographically related concern of extremists is the diffusion of modern culture and technology and its impact on traditional lifestyles and spiritual practices. Ridding the Islamic world of such influences is also a goal of Islamic extremists.

Islamic fundamentalists who have resorted to violence in pursuit of their cause (thereby becoming extremists) are relatively small in number. Yet one of the critical contemporary issues is the extent to which they can or will attract widespread support throughout the Islamic world. The potential for such support is greatest among those who feel that they are the losers in the contemporary global economic order and who feel their cultures are fundamentally threatened. By extension, a key to avoiding the division of the world into mutually antagonistic religious realms is to promote an atmosphere in which such feelings do not become widespread. This, in turn, suggests the importance of non-Islamic cultures conveying an understanding of the gap between mainstream and fundamentalist Islam, the gap between fundamentalist and extremist Islam, and supporting the economic and political efforts of genuinely democratic forces in Islamic countries.

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY

Boal's studies in Northern Ireland demonstrate that solving a religious conflict is typically not about theology; it is about identity. You are assigned the potentially Nobel Prize–winning task of "solving" the conflict either in Northern Ireland or in Israel and Palestine. Using Boal's example, determine how you can alter activity spaces and change identities to create the conditions for long-lasting peace in one of these major conflict zones.

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Summary

Religion is a major force in shaping and changing culture. The major world religions today all stem from an area of Eurasia stretching from the eastern Mediterranean to China. Major world religions are distributed regionally, with Hinduism in India; Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism, and Chinese philosophies in East and Southeast Asia; Islam reaching across North Africa, through the Middle East and into Southeast Asia; Shamanist religions mainly in Subsaharan Africa; and Christianity in Europe, Western Asia, the Americas, Australia and New Zealand. Judaism, another major world religion, is not as concentrated. Today, Judaism has a base in Israel and has adherents scattered throughout Europe and the Americas.

As the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., made clear, religious beliefs can drive people to extremist behaviors. On a day-to-day basis, however, religion more typically drives cultures—shaping how people behave, how people perceive the behaviors of others, and how people across place, scale, and time interact with each other.

Geographic Concepts

religion
secularism
monotheistic religion
polytheistic religion
animistic religion
universalizing religion
ethnic religion
Hinduism
caste system
Buddhism
Shintoism
Taoism
Feng Shui
Confucianism
Judaism
diaspora
Zionism
Christianity
Eastern Orthodox Church
Roman Catholic Church
Protestant
Islam
Sunni
Shi'ite
Shamanism
pilgrimage
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interfaith boundaries
intrafaith boundaries
genocide
activity space
relgious fundamentalism
religious extremism
shari'a laws
jihad

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http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/middle_east/2000/holy_places/default.stm

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