

## RELIGION AND GEOGRAPHY

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### INTRODUCTION

At first sight religion and geography have little in common with one another. Most people interested in the study of religion have little interest in the study of geography, and vice versa. So why include this chapter? The main reason is that some of the many interesting questions about how religion develops, spreads and impacts on people's lives are rooted in geographical factors (what happens where), and they can be studied from a geographical perspective. That few geographers have seized this challenge is puzzling, but it should not detract us from exploring some of the important themes.

The central focus of this chapter is on space, place and location - where things happen, and why they happen there. The choice of what material to include and what to leave out, given the space available, is not an easy one. It has been guided mainly by the decision to illustrate the types of studies geographers have engaged in, particularly those which look at spatial patterns and distributions of religion, and at how these change through time. The real value of most geographical studies of religion is in describing spatial patterns, partly because these are often interesting in their own right but also because patterns often suggest processes and causes.

### Definitions

It is important, at the outset, to try and define the two main terms we are using - geography and religion. What do we mean by 'geography'? Many different definitions have been offered in the past, but it will suit our purpose here to simply define geography as "the study of space and place, and of movements between places".

Religion is more difficult to define, and whilst many writers have offered working definitions, no single one captures the full meaning of the word. American cultural geographer Yi Fu Tuan (1976) posed the rhetorical question "What is the meaning of religion?". He then sought to answer it by reflecting on what people seek in, from or through religion. In his view, "the religious person is one who seeks coherence and meaning in his world, and a religious culture is one that has a clearly structured world view. The religious impulse is to tie things together. ... All human beings are religious if religion is broadly defined as the impulse for coherence and meaning. The strength of the impulse varies enormously from culture to culture, and from person to person." (Tuan 1976 p.271-2).

If it is difficult to agree a simple definition of religion, it is even harder to fit boundaries around its impact on people. As Tyler (1990 p.12) rightly points out, "many of the major religions of the world have become so inextricably linked with particular racial groups, cultures, political systems and lifestyles, that it is difficult to

imagine one without the other. It is hard to imagine Thailand without Buddhism, or India without Hinduism, for example. Christianity has become intricately bound up with the lifestyle of Western culture." In essence, religion is so deeply embedded into the matrix of many societies that it's boundaries are permeable and it's impacts pervasive.

## Themes

Religion leaves an imprint on landscape, through culture and lifestyle. Religious structures - such as places of worship, and other sacred sites - dominate many landscapes. Religious traditions - Hindu ritual bathing in the Ganges, for example - leave their mark on the physical appearance of an area. Religious observance - church attendance, and so on - affect the time management, spatial movements and behaviour of believers. Given the many ways in which religion affects people and places, there are many possible themes which could be considered here.

After briefly tracing the history of geographical interest in religion, this chapter focuses on two central themes which are both defined in terms of space and place.

The first theme is the distribution of religion. This can be approached at various scales, from the global to the local. At the global scale the important questions are "which religions are strongest in different places?" and "why might this be so?". Answers to such questions are often provided by more detailed studies of smaller scale distributions and dynamics. Here the key questions include "how do religious groups and new religions spread across space?", "how do they change through time?", and "what processes might account for observed patterns of change through space and time?".

The second central theme of the chapter is sacred places and sacred spaces, and how in turn they influence movements of people. A key question is "why are some places regarded as sacred and special, and why is everywhere not regarded as sacred?". In many religions people are actively encouraged to visit sacred places, and this gives rise to pilgrimage. The movement of large numbers of pilgrims to and within sacred sites is a special religious dynamic which can have very significant impacts on local economies and environments.

This choice of focus on distribution and sacred space allows us to explore some of the interesting work published by geographers of religion. But in adopting this focus we consciously overlook many interesting themes which might have been included had space been available. For example, what is the role of religion in defining culture regions (such as the Mormon Culture Region in Utah, and the Bible Belt in the southern states of the USA)? What role has religion played in shaping particular political landscapes (such as the partition of India in 1947, and the geopolitics of Ireland throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century)? How have religious factors been imprinted on the physical landscape (such as the distinctive Amish farming landscapes of North America)?

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Geography rarely appears in books on religion, and religion rarely appears in books on geography. One notable exception is the American college texts which offer a sweeping panorama of world geography, in which there is often a chapter on the global distribution of the major religions and belief systems. That chapter also often includes world patterns of language, and belief systems and means of expression are considered together as basic indicators of human diversity.

Most geography books have no place for religion, and few human geographers concede how important religion can be in shaping people's beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. Religion is also a major factor in culture and politics, yet geographers rarely pay more than passing attention to it. This is partly because of academic territoriality - other disciplines claim the study of religion as their own, and geography is happy to let them. But it also reflects the march of secularisation through much of the English-speaking world, encouraging many academics to downplay the possible significance of religion as a major influence on the day-to-day existence of many people.

## Past

It was not always this way. Lily Kong, a human geographer, has commented that "concerns linking geography and cosmology in the mind of the religious person lay at the heart of early geography, and in that sense a geography that incorporated religious ideas was evident from the earliest times." (Kong 1990, p.356). Thus, for example, geographers in ancient Greece accounted for the spatial order they observed all around them as the result of cosmological principles. Early Muslim geographers travelled widely and described the known world from an overtly Islamic perspective. Celtic monastic schools in Ireland, between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, were major seats of learning and the scholarship practised in them was biblical in essence and orientation.

During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, magic and cosmology were used in equal measure to explain the spatial layout of things across the Earth's surface. Manfred Buttner's (1979) detailed study of the development of geography in Germany during and after the Reformation reveal that many geography books were the work of theologians, and shows how geographers were concerned mainly to describe the spread of Christianity around the world. The 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the emergence of what some writers have referred to as ecclesiastical geography, typified perhaps by Nathaniel Carpenter's 1625 book *Geography Delineated Forth* - a treatise as much on theology as on geography. Varenius's (1649) *Descriptio Regni Iaponia* was probably the first major geographical description of the distributions of non-Christian religions, other than the earlier Islamic works.

Many scholars believe that the term 'geography of religion' was first used by Gottlieb Kasche in 1795, in a book (written and published in German) called *Ideas about Religious Geography*. Through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries one focus of study was the historical geography of biblical times. Amongst other things, geographers were interested in identifying places and names in the Bible, and establishing their locations. This period also saw a marked interest in natural theology - seeking signs of God's handiwork in nature.

## Present

Whilst religion is not a central theme in contemporary geography, it has not been overlooked completely. Many studies have been done on a wide variety of themes, and these are often published in specialised journals beyond the gaze of mainstream geographers, and usually way outside the literature read by students of religion. The literature is fairly extensive, but it mainly comprises published articles and research monographs.

To date - with the notable exception of Pierre Deffontaine's 1953 book *Geographie et Religions* (written and published in French) - only two books have been written specifically on the subject of Geography and Religion. The first, *Geography of Religions* by David Sopher, was published in 1967. It was widely read, has been much quoted, and has shaped the thinking of a whole generation of geographers interested in the geography-religion interface. My own book *Sacred Worlds: an introduction to Geography and Religion*, was published in 1994. It explores the ways in which religion, its symbols, rites, beliefs and hopes have shaped the world in which we live.

Two very different approaches have been adopted in recent work - 'religious geography' and 'geography of religion'. The former looks at the role of religion in shaping people's perceptions of the world and where and how people fit into it. It explores the role of theology and cosmology in constructing understanding of the universe. The latter is concerned not so much with religion per se, but with the many different ways in which religion is expressed. It sees religion as a human institution, and explores its social, cultural and environmental impacts. Most geographical research has tended to be of the second type, and that approach underpins the rest of this chapter.

## **DISTRIBUTIONS AND DYNAMICS**

The first of our two central themes is distribution and dynamics of religion at various scales. In this section we focus on distribution. The following section deals with dynamics, and in particular the ways in which ideas (in this case religious ideas) are spread spatially between people.

### **DISTRIBUTION**

Here we explore the global distribution of major religions (with a particular emphasis on Christianity), consider what factors might account for the observed patterns, and look in closer detail at the patterns and processes of religious change in North America.

### Classification

There are various ways of classifying religions, and the most commonly used ones reflect differences in belief. From a geographical perspective it is more useful to distinguish universal and ethnic religions. *Universal* (or *universalising*) religions - such as Christianity, Islam and the various forms of Buddhism - seek world-wide acceptance by actively looking for and attracting new members (converts). *Ethnic* (or

*cultural*) religions, are very different in that they do not seek converts. Each is identified with a particular tribal or ethnic group. *Tribal* (or *traditional*) religions involve belief in some power or powers beyond humans, to which they can appeal for help. Examples include the souls of the departed, and spirits living on mountains, in stones, trees or animals. More broad based *ethnic religions* include Judaism, Shintoism, Hinduism and the Chinese moral-religious system (embracing Confucianism and Taoism), which mainly dominate one particular national culture.

## Data

It would be nice to be able to construct maps showing different dimensions of religion at different scales, but quite often the data simply does not exist. Even where it does exist, it has to be handled with caution. Some countries have much more and better quality information on religion than others; indeed, for some countries, best guesses are all that exist. Where good quality data does exist, there are considerable variations between countries in reliability and spatial resolution. Not all data refer to the same time-period, too. Definitions and classifications are not always consistent from one country to another, so this adds further complexity. The most useful collection of statistics on contemporary religious distributions is contained in Barrett's (1982) monumental *World Christian Encyclopedia; a comparative study of churches and religions in the modern world, AD 1900-2000*.

Data are available which allow us to describe the distribution and relative strengths of major religions around the world. Unfortunately data limitations make it very difficult to examine other interesting dimensions of this religious tapestry, such as the degree of religious plurality in different places, or broad patterns of variables such as religious commitment, adherence or activism.

## Global distribution

Although at the start of the third millennium roughly one in three people on earth is classed as Christian, the spatial distribution is uneven. Thus - according to the 1982 *World Christian Encyclopedia* - a high percentage of the population in Europe (84 per cent), the Americas (91 per cent) and Oceania (84 per cent) is Christian, whereas the figure drops to 8 per cent in Asia and 45 per cent in Africa. Conversely, the great majority of Muslims (72 per cent) are in Asia, and most of the rest (26 per cent) are in Africa. Perhaps not surprisingly both Hinduism and Buddhism (both over 99 per cent) are overwhelmingly confined to Asia. Judaism, by far the smallest (numerically) of the five main world religions, has a much more dispersed pattern than the others.

The distinction between the universal and ethnic religions has a strong influence on their spatial distributions, as reflected in the world map (Figure 1).

Universal religions - as the name implies - are widely distributed. The ultimate goal of the three universal religions is to convert all people on earth. Believers are encouraged to share their beliefs with non-believers, and each universal religion engages in missionary activities and admits new members through individual symbolic acts of commitment. Christianity has an almost global pattern at the start of the third millennium, and Islam is dominant through much of Africa and Asia. Although

Buddhism transcends cultural and political boundaries, it still has a marked concentration in Southeast and East Asia.

Ethnic religions are often confined to particular countries. Thus, for example, Hinduism is particularly strong in India, Confucianism and Taoism are largely confined to China, and Shintoism is concentrated in Japan. Unlike the universal religions - where diffusion is a primary objective - the spread of ethnic religions is limited and takes place only slowly because they do not actively seek converts. Although in the historic past Judaism engaged in missionary activity, in principle (and largely in practice today) membership is reserved for the in-group by inheritance. In other ethnic religions, individuals are not accepted until they are fully assimilated into the community. India and China, for example, gradually absorbed foreign tribes into their dominant culture, which expanded accordingly.

Traditional religions still persist in many less developed parts of the world, including much of Africa, South America, parts of Southeast Asia, New Guinea and northern Australia.

### Diversity

Continental data (Table 1) offer clues about large-scale variations in religious diversity. Whilst they do contain members of other major religions, Europe, Oceania and the Americas are so heavily dominated by Christianity that to all intents and purposes they can be classed as Christian. Africa, on the other hand, is not so dominated by one religion; both Christianity and Islam are dominant in roughly equal measure. Asia presents a radically different religious profile, and - at this coarse continental scale at least - it is very pluralistic. Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity are all very strong there, though smaller scale patterns doubtless exhibit greater homogeneity in particular areas.

### Distribution of Christianity

Christianity can be singled out for special treatment for two reasons - it has more followers than any other religion, and it is better documented, particularly in terms of statistical information. We have already noted that nearly one in three of the world's population is classed as Christian, and that Christians are found in large numbers in most places.

The largest concentrations on Christians are in Europe and Latin America, where over half of the world's 1.5 thousand million Christians live, accounting for around 17 per cent of the global population. About one person in seven in North America and Africa is classed as Christian, accounting for nearly another half a billion individuals (just under a tenth of the world population).

Like all other major religions, Christianity is not monolithic and it is perhaps not surprising that the numerical strength (both absolute and relative) of different Christian sub-groups varies from place to place. The Eastern Orthodox Church is particularly strong in the former Soviet Union, and in parts of Europe and Africa (particularly North Africa). Roman Catholicism - altogether much larger and more

widely dispersed than the Orthodox Church - has its strongest presence, at least numerically, in South America and Europe. In South America almost all Christians belong to the Roman Catholic Church; in Europe well over half do.

Protestantism remains numerically quite strong in Europe, where it accounts for nearly one in five of all Christians. It has its strongest base in North America, where it accounts for over 40 per cent of Christians. About a quarter of the large and growing number of Christians in Africa is associated with the Protestant churches. The Anglican Communion - representing the Church of England, the Church of Ireland, the Episcopal Church in Scotland, the Church in Wales, the Episcopal Church in the United States, and other churches that are in full communion with each other - has most (70 per cent) of its members in Europe.

### Limitations

Whilst the world map (Figure 1) reveals interesting patterns of religion, like all maps it must be handled with caution. Interpretations of the patterns shown on it must take into account limitations inherent within the map and the data on which it is based.

Inevitably the map gives the impression that religion within any one of the shaded units is relatively uniform, which of course is clearly not the case. It shows dominant or prevailing religion only, and gives no indication of how competitive the situation is between leading and other religions. In this sense it also masks considerable variations in the strength of the absence of religion, not just in terms of the distribution of atheists and non-religionists but increasingly also in terms of the emergence of secular society.

The map can also be misleading in the sense that whilst large areas might be shown to have a particular religion dominant, what really matters is the population distribution - which is naturally not uniform within or between countries. Thus, for example, the large area in Australia classified as animism in reality accounts for a relatively small number of people (less than 3 million). Conversely, the few large North American cities classified under Judaism account for up to seven million individuals.

The map also reveals nothing about another important religious variable, and that is religious vitality or adherence. It would be misleading to assume that each religion shown in the distribution was followed equally faithfully by all of its believers in all places, or that each religion was followed as faithfully as the rest. Similarly, the distribution masks some quite significant variations in how religion is expressed, both within and between religions.

### Emergence and evolution

The mosaic of world religions raises interesting questions about how this pattern came into being, and what factors influenced it. Clearly, some components of the distribution are largely endemic. Animism, for example, is common amongst traditional societies and the archaeological evidence suggests that it was present in most cultures before more modern forms of religion took hold. Other components reflect religious persistence in or close to areas where those religions first appeared. Hinduism has dominated India since its birth, and Buddhism retains its foothold in the

area where it first spread and became important. A third set of components reflects the spread of major religions from original source areas over time. Christianity is a good example - from origins in the Middle East, it now spans the globe. We will look further at this question of origins, diffusion and dispersion of religions below (see page 000).

Present-day distributions of religions are merely snap-shots in a continuously unfolding moving film. At the global scale, two factors are particularly important in accounting for the distribution of the major religions at any point in time - the places where religions originated, and the processes by which they were dispersed and diffused.

One particularly striking aspect of the geography of religions is that all of the main world religions originated within a relatively small area in what is today south-western and southern Asia. Late nineteenth and early twentieth-century attempts to explain such puzzling geographical phenomena relied heavily on environmental determinism. This way of explaining things is founded on the assumption that human activities are controlled or determined by the environment, hence it is usually referred to as 'environmental determinism'.

The geographer Ellen Semple (1911) argued that early nomadic desert dwellers of the Middle East could see the movement of stars and planets through clear skies, which must have impressed on them order and progression and suggested that a single guiding hand created that order (hence the origin of monotheism in the Middle East). She also stressed that the imagery and symbolism of a religion are significantly affected by its place of birth, so that "the Eskimo's hell is a place of darkness, storm and intense cold; the Jew's is a place of eternal fire. Buddha, born in the steaming Himalayan piedmont, fighting the lassitudes induced by heat and humidity, pictured his heaven as Nirvana, the cessation of all activity and individual life." (p.41)

Huntington (1951 p.18) suggested that "every religion is at least modified by its surroundings, especially those of its birthplace". Like Semple, he also argued that objects of worship are frequently determined by geographical factors. Thus the Rain God is particularly important in India (where rains are uncertain), and the ancient Egyptians worshipped the River Nile (for similar reasons). According to this perspective Christianity originated in a dry region where sheep-herding was a major occupation and this led to the widely used biblical metaphor of the 'Good Shepherd'.

Environmental determinism is no longer regarded as credible by modern geographers because it places too much emphasis on the single factor of environment . It also ignores other factors such as the way in which religious ideas themselves changed as they spread out from source areas. But these early ideas were interesting and influential, and they persisted until at least the 1940s.

## Patterns and processes in North America

More studies have been undertaken into the geography of religion in the United States than in any other country, partly because more information is available for analysis. But cultural geographers there have long had an interest in religion as a cornerstone of



cultural diversity, and this has inspired numerous studies. A particularly useful data source is the *US Church Membership Study*, which has collected county level statistics for the entire country in 1951, 1971 and 1980. A number of studies have examined spatial patterns and changes through time using this data set. Note, however, that the data relate to church membership rather than religious activism - the two are related but not the same thing.

Present-day patterns are very striking. American Jews are almost entirely concentrated in cities, and Roman Catholics, Episcopalians and Unitarians are also predominantly urban. The Baptists, on the other hand, tend to be more heavily concentrated in rural areas, along with other smaller sects (such as the Mennonites, including Amish) and fundamentalist groups derived from Puritan settlers.

One hallmark of religion within the United States is its diversity. This melting pot of a country boasts an almost unrivalled variety of religions, reflecting both historic factors (particularly migration) and contemporary socio-economic processes.

Maps based on the Church Membership Survey results show some quite distinct patterns, which can be used to define religious regions (Figure 2). It is easy to pick out a strongly Catholic area in New England, and a broad region extending from the Middle Atlantic in the east to the Mormon region in the west with a mixture of denominations dominated by no single church (although Methodism is the largest single group). The Upper Middle West is dominated by Lutheran churches, and the Mormon region centred on Utah provides a distinctly separate religious (and cultural) unit. Baptists are the leading denomination in the South, where - together with other conservative fundamentalist denominations - they have give rise to the so-called 'Bible Belt'. Spanish Catholics dominate the Southwest. No single denomination dominates the West, but some studies identify two sub-regions there - the Pacific Southwest Region (strongly Catholic, with a large Jewish population in the Los Angeles area), and the Pacific Northwest (with even lower religious affiliation and Protestant dominance).

Interpretations of the national pattern usually place heavy emphasis on migration history. Thus, for example, the distribution of Roman Catholics partly reflects waves of immigrants from Europe and other parts of the Americas. A concentration of Catholics along the Mexican Border in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona might reflect the legacy of the Spanish-Mexican influence, along with recent immigration from across the border. Similarly, the Roman Catholic enclave in the coastal region of Louisiana betrays the area's French heritage. Large numbers of Catholic immigrants from Ireland and central and southern Europe have swamped the original Protestant stronghold of New England.

The distribution of Protestant church members also owes as much to history as to contemporary socio-economic factors. The South is strongly dominated by Baptists, and Lutherans dominate parts of the Mid-West farm belt. Congregational churches are still strong in New England, and are scattered throughout the Mid-West. The most widely dispersed of the Protestant denominations are the Methodists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians. The main centre of Methodism runs through the Middle Atlantic states and the southern part of the Mid-West to the Rocky Mountains, whilst the main

centre of Episcopalians stretches from their original core area in southern New England to Virginia.

American Jews also figure prominently in the religious scene. Since the 1950s the distribution of Jews across and within the United States has increased, although the Jewish population remained highly concentrated in metropolitan area counties. Regardless of their size, Jewish communities were overwhelmingly situated in areas characterised by high degrees of religious pluralism.

One of the problems of compiling maps of religious distributions is the impression given that patterns are unchanging through time. This is not necessarily so. Studies of changes in church membership between the 1950s and 1980s have shown remarkable stable patterns in denominational data, despite the high mobility of the US population (in a typical year one in five Americans changes their place of residence). This suggests that Americans do not carry their denominational affiliations with them when they move, but that they adopt the religious organisations of their new environment. The results are surprising, give that one might logically assume that a highly mobile population leads to religious mixing and, in turn, decreases the sharpness with which religious regions can be defined.

Regional culture in the United States appears to be not only strong, but also persistent. Some studies have uncovered a 20th century trend towards regional divergence between the main Protestant groups in the United States. For example, Baptists in the South, Lutherans in the upper Midwest and Mormons in the West all dominated their regions more thoroughly in the early 1980s than they did at the turn of the century.

## ***DYNAMICS - DIFFUSION AND DISPERSION***

In this section we consider the general processes involved in spreading ideas spatially between people, examine how the global pattern appears to have evolved, and by means of some small-scale case studies reflect on detailed processes and resultant patterns.

### **Processes**

Religion is in many ways like any other set of ideas or values that can be spread among and between groups of people, often separated by considerable distances. This involves processes of diffusion, which rest on two key principles. The first is that anything that moves must be carried in some way. This means that we must understand the processes, speeds and dynamics of this movement if we are to have any chance of understanding how and why diffusion occurs. It is not enough to simply be aware of the outcome (usually the spatial patterns) of the diffusion. The second principle is that the rate at which some things move over geographic space will be influenced by other things that get in the way. As a result, we must recognise the existence and operation of both carriers (which promote diffusion) and barriers (which inhibit diffusion).

There are two basic types of diffusion process -

- a. *expansion diffusion*; in which the number of people who adopt the innovation grows by direct contact, usually *in situ*. For example, an idea is communicated by a person who knows about it to one who does not, and through time the total number of knowers increases.
- b. *relocation diffusion*; this involves the initial group of carriers themselves moving, so they are diffused through time and space to a new set of locations. Migration is a classic relocation diffusion mechanism, because those who migrate take their beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour with them to new places. Missionaries who deliberately introduce religion into new areas fall into this category.

Expansion diffusion can be further sub-divided into -

- i. *contagious diffusion*; this is diffusion through a population by direct contact. Diseases spread this way. Such diffusion expands and spreads, and the speed of expansion is strongly influenced by the frictional effect of distance. This operates like a series of concentric waves moving over the surface of a pond after a stone has been thrown in - places close to the points of diffusion normally adopt the innovation first, and more distant places adopt after a time lag during which intervening places have adopted. In human terms, ideas are passed to people close to those who already have them. Much religious diffusion is of this contagious type, and takes place by contact conversion as a product of everyday contact between believers and non-believers.
- ii. *hierarchical diffusion*; here the idea or innovation is implanted at the top of a society and it appears to leap over intervening people and places. Innovations are adopted or received from the top of the hierarchy down. Hierarchical diffusion of religion has occurred through history when missionaries deliberately sought to convert kings or tribal leaders, in the hope that their people would follow.

The most common type of diffusion process for most innovations, including religious ideas and practices, is contagious expansion diffusion. Traditionally this has taken place mainly the physical relocation of people as carriers of the innovation (in this case a new religion). Modern telecommunications has opened up the prospect of using radio and television to spread religious messages across much bigger areas more quickly. Such processes underlie the evolution of televangelism in the United States.

Few innovations are so important or universally embraced that every single person in an area adopts them, and most innovations are voluntarily adopted by a large majority at best. Religion falls into this category, and universal religions engage in diffusion much more readily and deliberately than ethnic religions. This largely explains the significantly larger areas dominated by the universal religions, and the much larger number of followers they have.

### Emergence of the global pattern

The source areas - or, as some writers call them "cradle lands" - of the main religions are well established through detailed historical and archaeological research. Northern India provides the core area of Hinduism in the Punjab, and Buddhism (an offshoot of

Hinduism) in the Ganges Plain. From here both religions spread through the Indian subcontinent, but Hinduism (an ethnic religion) extended little further whilst Buddhism (a universal religion) dispersed across much of central and eastern Asia. Judaism and Christianity originated in Palestine, and Islam (partly based on both Judaism and Christianity) began in western Arabia. Both Christianity and Islam - the great universal monotheistic religions - dispersed widely through the old world. Christianity gained a particular stronghold in Europe and Islam spread through north and east Africa, as well as further east into central and southern Asia.

Geographers describe the two areas where the main religions originated as 'religious hearths' or 'religious heartlands'. The two areas share two important properties. First, they closely match the core locations of the major ancient civilisations in Mesopotamia and the Nile and Indus Valleys. This makes cultural evolution of religion a distinct possibility (although spatial correspondence does not in itself establish cause-effect). Secondly, and equally importantly, the religions emerged on the margins not the centres of the great civilisations. This hints at a more complex interplay between religion and culture, involving factors such as innovation and cultural diffusion, religious adaptation, and exchanges of ideas, beliefs and values along migration and trade routes.

Whatever the reasons for the emergence of religions within such a small area, the fact remains that many religions have spread far beyond their original homeland. Paradoxically, many religions are stronger today in countries other than their source areas. Many religions have changed a great deal as they have spread and grown, so that the form they display today is often far removed from their original form. Through dispersion the main religions have come into contact with and been influenced by different cultures and customs, some have divided into sub-groups (sects), and many have changed forms of worship and organisation. Modern Christianity, for example, is different to what it was like in the first century after Christ. Similarly, Hinduism has evolved a great deal over nearly thirty centuries.

The universal religions have an in-built dynamic towards expansion and diffusion, because they deliberately seek new converts. Thus, missionary zeal and endeavour must also be considered in the search for an explanation of contemporary religious patterns. One of the particular strengths of universal religions, as far as survival and growth are concerned, is their adaptability to local cultures. A religion that is adaptable can be modified to better suit new conditions it encounters, both as it spreads through space and it survives through time. The flourishing universal religion is thus able to assimilate dimensions of ethnic religion, which increases its attractiveness to new converts and promotes its prospects of long-term survival.

### Religions of the Indo-Gangetic Hearth

This important religious source area is based on the lowland plains of the northern edge of the Indian subcontinent that are drained by the Indus and Ganges rivers. Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism were born there. Hinduism had no single founder, and the reasons why it emerged here around 2000 BCE remain unclear. Buddhism and Sikhism evolved from Hinduism as reform movements, the former around 500 BC and the latter in the fifteenth century.

Once a religion is born, the quickest and easiest way in which it can spread is by diffusion. Throughout history India has been an important cultural cross-roads and a centre from which cultures, beliefs and values were scattered far and wide.

## **Hinduism**

Hinduism was the earliest major religion to emerge in this area, at least 4,000 years ago. It is known to have originated in the Punjab, in north-west. It later stretched from Afghanistan and Kashmir to Sarayu in the east, followed by a major wave of expansion across the Ganges to occupy the region between the Sutlej and the Jumna. From here it spread eastward down the Ganges and southward into the peninsula, absorbing and adopting other indigenous beliefs and practises as it spread. It was eventually to dominate the whole of the Indian sub-continent. Hindu missionaries later carried the faith overseas, during its major universalising phase, although most of the convert regions were subsequently lost. During the colonial period many hundreds of thousands of Indians were transported to other countries, including East and South Africa, the Caribbean, northern South America, and Pacific islands (particularly Fiji). This relocation diffusion effectively spread Hinduism far beyond its source area.

## **Buddhism**

Buddhism began in the foothills bordering the Ganges Plain about 500 BC, as an offshoot from Hinduism. Its founder was Prince Gautama (born 644 BC), who found Enlightenment while sitting under a pipal (Bodhi) tree. He later decided to make known to others the way of salvation he had found the (Middle Way between the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification), initially in the Deer Park at Isapatana (now called Sarnath, near Benares). Starting with five converts who became disciples (monks), the Buddha soon gathered around him sixty monks who were sent out to preach and teach. During the Buddha's lifetime his preaching activities were confined to northern India and a few small communities in the west of India. During the next two centuries Buddhism spread into other parts of India, although it was to remain confined to the Indian subcontinent for centuries after that. Missionaries and traders later carried Buddhism to China (100 BCE to 200 CE), Korea and Japan (300 to 500 CE), Southeast Asia (400 to 600 CE), Tibet (700 CE) and Mongolia (1500 CE). As it spread Buddhism developed many regional forms. Ironically, it was subsequently to die out in the very area it had originated, and was re-absorbed into Hinduism in India in the seventh century (although it has survived among the mountain people of the Himalayas and on the island of Sri Lanka).

## **Sikhism**

Sikhism originated in Punjab at the end of the fifteenth century in a reform movement initiated by a spiritual leader called Nanak. Before long he was being regarded as a holy man (guru), his ideas found widespread support, and he was preaching to large numbers, many of who had travelled especially to hear him. The new religion was widely adopted in the Punjab because it offered a fresh spiritual idea which people found attractive, particularly its criticism of the caste system that was so central a part of Hinduism. It grew fastest when peaceful conditions prevailed, which was not always the case (especially because of disturbance by Muslim invaders), and its consolidation and expansion were greatly aided by initial political patronage. During

the first 2 centuries Sikhism remained confined to its source area in the Punjab, mainly because successive gurus were chosen in accordance with family lines. Between about 1850 and 1971 there was considerable diffusion of Sikhism. Sometimes this occurred by voluntary migration, because the Sikh community was notoriously adventurous. Often the diffusion followed forced migration caused by political unrest. This was so especially with the creation of Pakistan after the partition of India in 1947, which divided the Punjab into an Islamic western half and a dominantly Hindu eastern half. Large numbers of Sikhs embarked on a mass exodus to India from the former West Punjab and other states in Pakistan. Since partition there has been an almost complete shift of the Sikh population from West Pakistan to India. Many of the immigrants settled in Punjab, where nationalism based on both religion and language led to the eventual formation of Punjabi Suba (state) in 1966.

## Religions of the Semitic Hearth

Judaism, Christianity and Islam - the three great monotheistic religions - all developed first among the Semitic-speaking people in or on the margins of the deserts of south-western Asia in what is today the Middle East. Like the religions of the Indo-Gangetic Hearth, these three have family ties. Judaism originated about 4,000 years ago, and Christianity emerged from within Judaism 2,000 years ago. Islam was born in western Arabia about 1300 years ago. Many writers have questioned why it should be that the three great monotheistic religions all developed in the same basic core area but at different times. Environmental factors cannot be ruled out, as the determinists enthusiastically argued before about the 1950s, but it is much too simplistic to seek one single or even one dominant cause or explanation.

Monotheism has spread throughout the world, and between them Christianity and Islam have nearly 2.4 thousand million believers, accounting for half of the world population. Christianity and Islam, two dominant universalising religions, have played key roles in the dispersion of monotheism from their initial Middle East heartland. Judaism, the oldest Semitic religion that does not seek new converts and thus remains an ethnic religion, has played a more minor role, at least numerically.

### **Judaism**

Judaism developed out of the cultures and beliefs of Bronze Age people who wandered through the deserts of the Middle East nearly 4,000 years ago. Like all major religions, Judaism spread and was quickly dispersed over a wide area. By 586 BC, when King Solomon's Holy Temple was destroyed, the Ten Tribes that constituted the northern kingdom of Israel had already been resettled in northern Assyria for four generations. This diffusion and scattering were to become a prominent feature of Judaism through the rest of its history. The Jewish Diaspora (dispersion) began some time before 550 BC, and it was led by Jewish refugees and immigrants who refused to give up their faith when persecuted by pagan neighbours. Judaism spread into Europe by the forced and voluntary migration of Jews, starting with the forced dispersal from Palestine in Roman times that scattered Jews throughout the Mediterranean Basin. Through time most European Jews became concentrated around the present Russian-Polish border in an area that became known as the "Jewish Pale". In 1939 well over half the world's Jews were living in Europe

and the Soviet Union (almost 10 million). Poland housed over 3 million, and there were other concentrations in the Soviet Union, Romania and Germany. Modern Zionism (the political movement for the establishment of a national homeland for Jews in Palestine) has roots in medieval Jewish migrations to the Holy Land. But the most important catalyst was a series of shocks that shattered the life of Jews in Europe, the most prominent of which was the rise of Nazism in 1933 and its attempt to annihilate totally the Jews in its conquered territories from 1939 to 1945 (the Holocaust).

## **Christianity**

Christianity began in Jerusalem when disciples of Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed that he was the expected Messiah. The movement spread slowly while Jesus was alive, but after Jesus' death it spread more rapidly. The diffusion was greatly assisted by Christian preachers and missionaries. It spread first to Samaria (in northern ancient Palestine), then to Phoenicia to the north-west, and south to Gaza and Egypt. Afterwards it was adopted in the Syrian cities of Antioch and Damascus, then subsequently in Cyprus, modern Turkey, modern Greece, Malta and Rome. It spread fast, and numbers quickly grew. Within the first century there were an estimated million Christians, comprising less than one per cent of the total world population. But within 400 years over 40 million people, nearly a quarter of the total population, had adopted Christianity. Imperial sponsorship of Christianity in the fourth century accounted for its rapid increase in influence and membership. The early spread of Christianity through the Roman Empire was achieved mainly by relocation diffusion aided by the well-developed system of imperial roads. Christian missionaries like Paul travelled from town to town spreading the gospel message.

In later centuries the pattern of Christianity reflected hierarchical expansion diffusion; early congregations were largely confined to towns and cities while the countryside remained largely pagan. Once planted in an area, Christianity spread further via contagious diffusion (contact conversion). Christianity diffused through Europe along a number of different routes, mainly via missionaries initially. Diffusion and adoption were slow during the first 300 years, and most early converts were town dwellers. Progress speeded up after 313 when the Christian Roman Emperor Constantine issued an edict of toleration for Christianity that led eventually to its status as state religion. The Roman Catholic church emerged in the fifth century, presided over by the bishop of Rome (the Pope). During the fourth and fifth centuries the Roman church spread rapidly in the western Mediterranean. Roman Catholic missionaries introduced Christianity to northern Europe. Between the fifth and seventh centuries Roman Catholicism gained a stronghold throughout Britain. Monks were an important and effective vehicle in the spread of Christianity around Europe, and monasteries were hubs in a network of diffusion points.

While Christianity was winning its battle against paganism in northern Europe, Islam was making inroads into the already Christianised Mediterranean region. In the eighth century North Africa was won by Islam, and has remained Muslim ever since. A sizeable area within the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) was under Muslim rule for many centuries.

The world-wide dispersion of Christianity coincides with the era of colonial acquisition by European countries. Roman Catholicism was introduced into Middle and South America by the Spanish, after they had invaded the continent in the mid-sixteenth century. Much of Africa and small parts of India were converted by Christian missionaries, who were particularly active there during the nineteenth centuries. The Reformation in the sixteenth century served to intensify rather than diminish the enthusiasm of the Christian church for evangelism. Jesuits introduced Christianity into many areas including Ethiopia, Morocco, Egypt, India, China, Japan, the Philippines, Persia, Tibet, Ceylon, Malaya, Siam, Indochina and the East Indies. Many Protestant refugees from the seventeenth century onwards emigrated to North America to escape conflict and oppression in Europe, taking their Calvinist brand of Christianity with them and planting it firmly there. Christianity has remained a universalising religion, with an abiding commitment to active proselytism (the conversion of non-believers).

## **Islam**

Islam means 'submission to God', and this strict monotheistic religion was founded by Mohammed in Medina in 622 (the year taken as the start of the Islamic calendar). By the time Mohammed died in 632, he ruled the whole of Arabia (in both religious and political terms). Islam spread and expanded mostly by force initially, because conversion of the mainly Christian populations it encountered usually required political control. Within less than a hundred years, Arab Muslims had conquered lands over a vast area - stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in western Europe to the borders of India, and including Spain, North Africa, Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia. Today's distribution of Islam reflects a significant retreat from this early core emirate or territory, although the spread of Islam into India, Central Asia, the Sudan and the margins of East Africa has left an enduring legacy. Islam also has a strong presence in south east Asia.

One important factor in the rapid spread of Islam was its emergence at the hub of a series of important trade routes, including caravan trails leading from the Middle East through Central Asia to North China, and across the Sahara to the Sudan. Many Muslim traders were also effective missionaries, acting as multiple diffusion nuclei who travelled widely. Expansion diffusion accounts for the spread of Islam from its Arabian source area, and relocation diffusion accounts for its subsequent dispersal to Malaysia, Indonesia, South Africa and the New World. Unlike Hinduism, Islam attracted converts wherever it took hold. New core areas soon turned into effective source areas for further dispersion, by a combination of contagious and hierarchical diffusion. In recent years Islam has once again started to spread into Europe, caused not by military invasion but by the immigration of dispossessed Muslims from North Africa, the Middle East and southern Asia.

Europe now houses an estimated 7.5 million practising or cultural Muslims, many of them in France, Germany and Britain. Muslims constitute the second largest population group within the former Soviet Union, and their numbers are rising at a rate four times as fast as the Soviet population as a whole. Separatist movements quickly emerged in the dying days of Communist rule, and by 1990 the peoples of the Soviet Union's Muslim republics (Azerbaijan, Kazakstan, Kirgizia, Tajakstan, Turkmenia and Uzbekistan) were seeking to regain control of their own destinies.



## Small scale case studies

Small scale case studies are useful for illustrating some of the detailed processes by which religion spreads from one place to another. They show what sorts of diffusion and dispersion processes are at work, and suggest key components of the dynamics involved. Surprisingly few studies are recorded in the geographical literature. Two are summarised below; details of others - including the spread of Christian Science and of the Shakers in North America, and of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Spain - can be found in *Sacred Worlds* (Park 1994).

### **Black Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church**

The spread of the Black Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church in the United States between 1870 and 1970 (Tatum and Sommers 1975) is a classic illustration of relocation diffusion. Although the major white branches of the Methodist Church in the United States reunited after a rift during the Civil War, the black branches did not.

The CME church was organised in December 1870. Its policies and practices were identical to those of the Methodist Episcopal Church (South), except for its use of two significant black American adaptations - the use of 'old time' preaching and black American music. The church played a vital role in empowering freed slaves and in enabling them for better integration into mainstream (white) American society.

The Black or 'Southern' CME, as an ethnic church for black slaves, was originally confined to the southern states. Through time, after emancipation, its members migrated from the South, and they took their church with them and planted it where they settled. As a result, membership of the CME diffused widely and within a hundred years there were churches and active members in most states. From its birthplace in Tennessee, the church spread with its migrant members to the Mississippi Delta, Georgia, Alabama and Texas. Further expansion followed, through the urban complexes of the Middle West, West Coast and the East.

Three mechanisms assisted the consolidation of the CME church as it was diffused by member migration. One was the mobility of CME ministers. Itinerant preachers toured a church circuit on foot or horseback, often preaching in homes and uniting black communities. Resident ministers exchanged circuits periodically, some as frequently as each year. A second mechanism was the dissemination of CME teaching through publications, especially *The Christian Index* and regional variants, which attracted new members and helped existing ones to feel part of a cohesive family of believers. Provision of educational opportunities was the third mechanism, and a network of CME institutions of higher learning (including colleges such as Texas College) has broadened the horizons of many church members, promoted the church's existence and black focus, and established the legitimacy of the CME on the American cultural landscape.

### **Old Order Amish in Europe and North America**

Interesting patterns and processes are also evident in the diffusion, growth and survival of one small religious sect, the Old Order Amish (Crowley 1978). The Amish

started life in Switzerland as a conservative reformist group within the Mennonite Anabaptist movement, under the leadership of Jakob Amman between 1693-1697.

In the early years of the Amish movement, congregations grew and spread largely through conversion, by contagious expansion diffusion. But during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries religious persecution was to cause them to move a number of times. This triggered a phase of relocation diffusion, initially within Europe but subsequently across the Atlantic. From about 1710 onwards, when the movement was about 15 years old, Amish filtered out from core areas in Bern Canton (Switzerland), Alsace (in north east France) and the Palatinate (in south west Germany). They took their religion with them as they settled in many areas across central and western Europe. The first large migration wave of Amish exiles from Bern Canton passed down the Rhine and settled in the Netherlands in 1711. By 1721 they had established separate Amish congregations amongst Dutch Mennonites in Groningen and Kampen. There were several major movements of Amish from Alsace between 1710 and 1825, to new locations in France, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria and Bavaria. Some migrants from the Palatinate joined their fellow Amish in Austria and Bavaria, while others moved to the Netherlands and other destinations.

Two things are striking about these waves of migrating Amish. One is that many of the transfers were over great distances. The other is that the persecution-driven movements spread Amish communities over a wide area within Europe.

A number of factors appeared to have influenced the choice of where to relocate to. Some destinations were chosen because they guaranteed the Amish freedom to worship as they pleased. Others reflected the eagerness of some noblemen - who were well aware of the reputation of the Amish as hard workers and good stewards of resources - to employ them as farmers.

Faced with continuing religious persecution, the Amish adopted a number of strategies. Many moved to North America in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some of those who stayed behind eventually relaxed the strict Amish code of conduct, which prohibited contact with outsiders, and associated with local non-Amish and even inter-married with them. In Switzerland only three Amish congregations existed after 1750, there were only two by 1810 and by 1850 all the Swiss Amish had rejoined the Mennonites. Amish congregations in the Netherlands remained independent for nearly 200 years and then merged into the general Dutch Mennonite body in the 19th century. The remaining European Amish, confronted with the real prospect of religious extinction, decided instead to rejoin their Mennonite brethren in 1937.

Two main waves of Amish immigrants arrived in North America, seeking refuge from incessant religious persecution in Europe. The first wave lasted from about 1717 to 1750. It involved about 500 people, mainly from the Palatinate, who settled in Pennsylvania largely because of attractive land offers from William Penn's agents. Around 1500 Amish, almost entirely from Alsace and Lorraine, arrived in the second wave between 1817 and 1861. They settled in Canada and the United States, but most chose Ohio, Illinois, Iowa and southern Ontario where land was cheaper and more available than in Pennsylvania. Both migration waves gave rise to new Amish

settlements in the United States, and diffusion within the United States continued between the waves while few immigrants were arriving.

There were quite five distinct phases of Amish diffusion and settlement. During the 'First Wave' (1717-1816) Amish settlements were established by newly arrived immigrant groups in south-eastern Pennsylvania. The 'Second Wave' (1817-1861) saw the arrival of the second group of immigrants, mainly from Alsace. The new arrivals founded colonies in western Ohio, central Illinois and south-eastern Iowa. Many of the 'First Wave' settlements continued to expand, with new settlements started in Ohio and north-eastern Indiana. Phase three (1862-1899) brought to a close the 'Westward Advance' as the supply of virgin frontier land started to run out. But the Amish continued to expand westwards into North Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and Colorado (the Great Plains) and into more southern states (Maryland, Missouri, Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee and Virginia). The establishment of new Amish settlements continued at a similar rate during the 'early modern era' (1900-1944), but patterns of expansion changed significantly. Little colonisation occurred within the core area, and most new settlements were located in Great Plains and Southern states surrounding the core. The impetus to start new Amish settlements survived into the 'modern era' (1945-1970s), when 42 per cent of all recorded Amish settlements attempted in the United States were founded. Most new colonies were founded in states that already had an Amish presence, particularly Pennsylvania where 23 new communities were started over that thirty year period.

The diffusion of the Amish, initially within Europe and subsequently within the United States, illustrates some interesting aspects of the diffusion process. One is the continued relocation diffusion that has caused Amish groups to migrate a number of times both within and between countries. Secondly, the evolution of the pattern of Amish settlements, particularly in the United States, has been neither uni-directional nor linear. Settlements were established and abandoned, and the distribution changed markedly through time. A third property of the Amish diffusion is the way in which its objectives have changed through time, from an initial enthusiasm for growth via conversion to a more long-term commitment to survive and grow through natural increase.

### **SACRED SPACE AND SACRED PLACES**

One of the more prominent geographical dimensions of religious expression is the notion of sacred space. Most religions designate certain places as sacred or holy, and this designation often encourages believers to visit those places in pilgrimage and puts responsibilities on religious authorities to protect them for the benefit of future generations.

Much of the work on this theme builds upon the foundation established by Eliade (1959) in his influential book on *The Sacred and the Profane*. He explores how ordinary (profane) space is converted into holy (sacred) space, and suggests that this symbolic process reflects the spiritual characteristics associated with both the physical features and the deeper, abstract implications of delimiting a particular site as sacred. Designation of a site as sacred is generally a response to two types of events. Some events (which he calls *hierophanic*) involve a direct manifestation on earth of a deity,

whereas in other (*theophanic*) events somebody receives a message from the deity and interprets it for others.

## **SACRED SPACE AND PLACES**

The religious expression of sacred space varies greatly through space and time, and there is abundant evidence from many cultures that the notion of sacred space is deep-rooted and long-lived. Early pagan cultures had their own definition of sacred space that controlled where people went, what they did and how they did it.

### **Sacred sites**

There is no easy answer to the question of what defines the holiness or sanctity of a place. Yi Fu Tuan (1978 p.84) argues that the true meaning of 'sacred' goes beyond stereotype images of temples and shrines, because "at the level of experience, sacred phenomena are those that stand out from the commonplace and interrupt routine." He puts an emphasis on qualities such as apartness, otherworldliness, orderliness and wholeness in defining what is sacred. Sacred places also share two important properties - they are not transferable (they are valued because of their associated holiness), and they do not need to be re-established with each new generation (there is an inherited appreciation of the holiness of the site).

How are sacred sites selected? There is no simple answer because different religions select their sacred sites on different criteria, and the criteria used even within one religion can change through time. Most sacred sites persist, so the inventory at any one point in time is the outcome of many earlier decisions.

Some sacred sites are selected because they are associated with people who have some particular religious significance or credibility. For example, many individual pilgrimage sites in Islam and Hinduism mark significant places in the lives of religious founders or leaders. Sites associated with the life of the Buddha - such as his birthplace at Lumbini in Nepal, Bodh-Gaya in India where he received enlightenment, and Sarnath (near Varanasi) where he first preached - are both sacred and heavily visited. Sacred sites are sometimes selected through an association with earlier myths and legends. Many landscape legends invoke the Devil acting as God's agent of retribution, and many prehistoric monuments (stone circles and alignments, single standing stones, remains of chamber graves) have traditionally been explained this way. One of the most popular type of local legend in Europe is those which deal with buildings or towns submerged by the sea, a lake or swamp because of their wicked inhabitants (such as Llyn Syfadon - Llangorse Lake - in Wales).

Many sacred sites are recycled earlier religious sites. There are many examples, including Christian chapels in Egypt converted from pre-Christian rock-tombs, ancient Egyptian temples converted to Christian use, and early Christian churches built within ancient temples in Egypt and Cyprus. Many early British churches were sited either on or adjoining prehistoric or other pagan monuments. The re-use of existing sacred places greatly assisted the early spread of Christianity amongst non-believers, but it also ensured that they survived as sacred space (albeit with a different religious orientation).

The location of sacred sites in India largely reflects historic and topographic factors. One topographic factor of particular importance in Hinduism is proximity to water. Many sacred sites are concentrated along the seven sacred rivers of the Hindus - the Ganga (Ganges), the Yamuna, the Saraswati, the Narmada, the Indus (Sindhu), the Cauvery and the Godavari. The Ganges is India's holiest of holy rivers and there are many sacred shrines on its banks.

### Sacred directions

Sacredness is not confined to particular places, because many religions also favour certain sacred directions and orientations. Ancient religions based on sun worship had particular reverence for east. Old Testament passages show that the ancient Jews also favoured the direction of Jerusalem (the City of God) and regarded north as unfavourable. The Prophet Mohammed originally followed Jewish tradition and prayed towards Jerusalem, until he received a revelation from God instructing him to turn his back upon it and face Mecca. Since then the sense of Holy Direction (towards Mecca) has had a pervasive influence on the everyday life of Muslims. Throughout the world of Islam the faithful turn towards Mecca to pray, and they are forbidden to spit or relieve nature facing in that sacred direction.

Sacred directions are also reflected in the orientation of churches, mosques and synagogues. In the west Jewish synagogues are mostly aligned from west to east, with worshippers facing the Ark towards Jerusalem (in the east they are aligned in the opposite direction towards Jerusalem). Since the eighth century Christian churches have been oriented with the altar (viewed as paradise) facing east. Orthodox Christian churches also have their altar at the eastern end. In Muslim mosques, a special niche (the *mihrab*) is built into a wall so that the prayers of those facing it will be addressed toward Mecca.

Some ancient cultures developed remarkable abilities to navigate by the stars, to pinpoint precise locations by astronomical survey, and to orientate ceremonial structures in preferred directions. The Maya American Indians are a good example because they built vast, carefully planned and well-engineered ceremonial centres (up to 900 CE). Building orientation appears at first sight to be random, but field surveys show that many Maya structures are aligned to astronomical positions or roughly towards magnetic north (reflecting the fact that the ruling priest class were masters of astronomy and mathematics). Religious orientation is also evident in mythical thinking in ancient Egypt. The ancient Egyptians saw their land as a place where their gods resided but also where the creation of the world began. Egypt was viewed as the centre of the world - the "kingdom in the middle" - and map making in Egypt was developed for both secular and religious purposes (to guide the soul through the realms of the after-world). Sacred structures were sometimes oriented in relationships with what was assumed to be the original primal hill (the source and centre of the world).

### **PILGRIMAGE**

The notion of sacred space is clearly very important in both theory and practice. It demarcates certain places and spaces as having some particular religious association, and by definition sets them apart from the rest of geographical space. The dynamics of sacred space are even more interesting to geographers, who have shown great interest in how and why pilgrims travel to sacred sites, and how their pilgrimages affect environment and society particularly in and around their destinations.

Pilgrimage represents the main physical manifestation of the abiding pull of such sacred places, sometimes involving vast numbers of people travelling by various means from around the world. Few secular places can regularly attract as many visitors as Mecca and Lourdes, and the economic significance of pilgrims to such places must not be underestimated.

### Pilgrim movements

The Collins English Dictionary (1979) defines *pilgrimage* as "a journey to a shrine or other sacred place", and a *pilgrim* as "a person who undertakes a journey to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion". Such journeys often involve large number of people, who travel long distances by a variety of means, often for specific religious festivals. Pilgrimages are typical of both ethnic and universalising religions, and they are found in the major historical religions - Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism.

Pilgrimage is motivated by different factors in different places. Some pilgrim trips are made out of duty, whereas others are made in the hope of receiving special blessings or healing. Yet others are made to increase personal holiness, or just simply to escape temporarily from the pressures of modern society. It is important to distinguish between pilgrimage that is obligatory (as in modern Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca) and pilgrimage that is a voluntary act involving a vow or promise (such as early Christian sacred travel to Palestine or Rome). Obligatory pilgrimage inevitably involves larger numbers, guarantees the survival of the pilgrimage route and destinations, and has its own in-built dynamics.

Pilgrimage differs from most other types of journey because it is a religious act in its own right, it is made for a specific (spiritual) purpose, and it represents a pathway to particular sacred places. Unlike other types of journey, the pilgrimage usually introduces social, economic and physical difficulties or sacrifices for the pilgrims, who usually accept them with resignation as part of the special nature of pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage can have significant impacts on some areas by promoting particular forms of tourism. It can have a major effect on local economies, by encouraging the development of infrastructure such as shrines, shops selling devotional articles, and facilities for overnight accommodation (including dormitories and camp sites). In some places pilgrimage is the dominant form of tourism, although it is often very seasonal and short-lasting.

### Ritual

The word pilgrim comes from the Latin *peregrinus*, which literally means foreign, travelling or migratory. Yi Fu Tuan (1984 p.5) sees religious pilgrimage as a ritual by which we break up "the drowsiness of routine" that dictates the pattern of our daily life. He contrasts being 'in place' and 'out of place', suggesting that we spend most of our lives *in place* (surrounded by the security of familiar relationships, habits and routines), but we have a periodic need as individuals and as society to transcend place (and then be *out of place*).

These rituals that break up our routines expand our horizons - if only fleetingly - to embrace the cosmos. Pilgrimage represents a particular religious rite of passage, which involves separation (leaving home), transition (travel to the sacred place) and incorporation (arrival). The very act of engaging in the pilgrimage changes many pilgrims. They begin in a Familiar Place (at home), journey to a Far Place (the pilgrimage shrines, which are usually distant and peripheral to the rest of their lives), then return - ideally changed - to the Familiar Place. The journey itself is as important as the destination. There are few better illustrations of this than the Exodus of the ancient Jews and their journeys in search of the Promised Land (as documented in the Old Testament).

### Traditional and postmodern perspectives

Recent years have seen the emergence of new 'postmodern' conceptions of pilgrimage to sacred places, which challenge traditional perspectives. In the traditional view, after Eliade and others, "the power of a miraculous shrine is seen to derive solely from its inherent capacity to exert a devotional magnetism over pilgrims from far and wide, and to exude of itself potent meanings and significances for its worshippers ... its power is internally generated and its meanings are largely predetermined." (Eade and Sallnow 1991, p.9). The traditional view, therefore, is that some places are inherently sacred, and the act of pilgrimage bestows inherent benefits.

The postmodern view is very different, because it argues that meanings are not inherent but are attributed by those who believe in the notion of sacred space. In the postmodern view, "pilgrimages are journeys to the sacred, but the sacred is not something which stands beyond the domain of the cultural; it is imagined, defined, and articulated within cultural practice" (Bowman 1991, p.120-1). In this perspective, therefore, different people bring their own perceptions and meanings to the sacred place. As a result, sacred spaces have projected onto them a range of different meanings and interpretations, even amongst believers.

The two best known and best documented large scale pilgrimages are the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia and Catholic pilgrimage to Lourdes in France. They reveal many interesting dimensions of the pilgrimage ritual and experience.

### Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca

The annual pilgrimage of Muslims to Mecca - the so-called *Hajj* - is a remarkable movement of people in the Middle East in terms of both size and durability. It has endured the 13 centuries of Islam virtually without interruption. Its influence extends

to all the countries of Islam, and for one month every year the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia (with a resident population of around 150,000) has more visitors (over a million) than any other city in the world. The Hajj is a major source of income for Saudi Arabia (the third largest earner after oil exports and spending by oil companies). Indeed, before oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia in 1938, spending by pilgrims was the country's largest source of foreign exchange earnings.

To Muslims the pilgrimage to Mecca is not simply an act of religious obedience, it is a duty. It is the fifth pillar (foundation of faith) of Islam - along with declaration of faith, prayer, charity and fasting - although it is the only one that is not obligatory. Islam requires that every adult Muslim perform the pilgrimage to Mecca and to nearby Arafat and Mina (where they receive the grace of Allah) at least once in a lifetime. But the obligation is deferred for four groups of people - those who cannot afford to make the pilgrimage; those who are constrained by physical disability, hazardous conditions, or political barriers; slaves and those of unsound minds; and women without a husband or male relative to accompany them. Most Muslims do make the pilgrimage at least once, and for many of them the trip is the culmination of a lifetime's saving. For many Muslims (*hajjees*) the pilgrimage is a time of great hardship and personal suffering, and until recently many pilgrims died along the way (from exhaustion, hunger, thirst, disease). Death during the pilgrimage is regarded as particularly honourable and is believed to guarantee entry into the afterlife.

### **The Hajj**

The Hajj commences on the 8th day of the twelfth month (*Dhu'l-Hijja*) of the Muslim lunar year and ends on the thirteenth day of *Dhu'l-Hijja*. Prescribed rites are performed which follow the order of the farewell pilgrimage in prayers and physical movement to the various sites as performed by the Prophet Mohammed in 632 CE. The rites and rituals are performed in a tightly defined sequence. The Hajj pilgrimage is multi-dimensional, involving the visit to and walk around the Kaaba (the holy shrine in Mecca, containing the black stone), visits to various other holy sites in and around Mecca, the walk between the two hills of al-Safa and al-Marwah, and finally the return to Mecca for a last visit to the Kabaa.

Most pilgrims stay in Mecca for about a month, although the actual ceremonies take only a few days. Pilgrims who have travelled far to reach Mecca often stay a year or longer. Many also visit Medina - Islam's second holy city, 300 km north of Mecca - where the prophet Mohammed died and is buried. Both Mecca and Medina are forbidden to non-Muslims. Boundary stones on all routes leading into the cities mark the point (30 km out) beyond which non-believers must not pass.

Large numbers of animals are slaughtered annually during the Hajj. It is estimated that about a million animals (mainly sheep, goats, camels and cattle) are transported to Mina (near Mecca) and slaughtered there according to strict rituals. Disposal of the vast number of carcasses, within seven days, has to be carefully planned and managed to avoid sanitary problems in the hot, dry environment.

### **Movement of people**



Traditionally many pilgrims travelled overland to Mecca, using two main caravan routes, from Syria and Egypt. A popular pilgrim caravan travelled across Central Africa from the west coast eastwards to Nigeria. Many African pilgrims spent up to three years on their journey, trading, working or begging along the way, travelling mostly on foot with their families. It was not uncommon for children to be born along the way, and for many pilgrims to die before they reached their holy goal.

The growth in significance of the Hajj has affected transport in a number of ways. New pilgrimage routes were established linking Mecca with Iraq, Iran and Oman, and the overall pattern of transport within Saudi Arabia became highly focused on Mecca. Pilgrim traffic is heavily concentrated at one time in the year, and it is unidirectional in nature (towards Mecca before the pilgrimage, away from Mecca afterwards). The movement of vast numbers of pilgrims towards Mecca has also encouraged the expansion of settlements and oases along pilgrim routes.

Numbers attending the Hajj have fluctuated through time, largely in harmony with waves of economic and political change around the world. Analyses have shown that the estimated 152,000 pilgrims in 1929 had fallen to 20,000 in 1933 because of world depression, and then recovered to 67,000 in 1936 and 100,00 in 1937. World War II saw a fall in the number of pilgrims (there were an estimated 9,000 non-Arab pilgrims in 1939). Since 1945 numbers have risen progressively, with minor downturns associated with Arab wars (such as the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, when many Muslims are reported to have given their Hajj savings to the Arab cause).

Two factors seem to account for much of the observed pattern of pilgrim movements to Mecca - relative time and relative cost, which influence pilgrims' choice of mode of travel (by air or sea). The longer the duration of the journey from a country the higher the percentage of its pilgrims who travel by air. The higher the cost of air travel relative to sea travel from a particular country, the lower the percentage of its pilgrims who choose the air mode.

### Roman Catholic pilgrimage in Europe

There are many religious sites within Europe that attract vast numbers of pilgrims, most of them associated with Roman Catholicism. Nolan and Nolan's (1989) book *Religious pilgrimage in modern Western Europe* is a useful source of information. There are more than 5,000 pilgrimage sites within Europe that are visited by an estimated 70 to 100 million people per year. France has the greatest concentration of Catholic shrines, but there are also large numbers in Austria, the former West Germany, Italy and Spain. The shrines vary from major international pilgrimage centres, which attract millions of visitors each year from around the world, to local sites such as small chapels, roadside crosses and holy wells visited by the faithful from surrounding villages.

Many of the Christian shrines dotted throughout Europe date back nearly two millennia. Nolan's inventory shows that the first such shrines developed at the tombs of apostles and martyrs possibly as early as the end of the first century AD, and that about four per cent of the shrines were holy places in pre-Christian pagan times.

Most Christian pilgrimage focuses on a specific historical person and by far the most common subject of devotion in modern Catholic pilgrimage is the Virgin Mary (Mother of Jesus), to which two-thirds of Europe's shrines are dedicated. Christ is venerated at only one in twelve sites and just over a quarter of the sites is dedicated to saints. Many of the Catholic shrines contain cult objects, including the physical remains of deceased holy people, and objects touched by or associated with such people. In the European tradition, the actual image is not so important as what it represents.

Just under half of Europe's active shrines are associated with sacred features of site, particularly height, water, trees and groves, caves and stones. Such environmental features were important aspects of pilgrimage shrine location in pre-Christian Europe, and suggest that many Christian shrines may have either reused earlier holy sites or adopted one with similar environments.

### **Lourdes**

Without doubt the best-known pilgrimage centre in Europe is Lourdes in south west France, at the foot of the Pyrenees close to the Spanish border. It is a major tourist centre, with the second largest number of hotels in France after Paris. Yet the pattern of religious tourism is unusual because most visitors go there between April and October and most visits are very short.

This small town, with a population of around 18,000, attracts up to five million pilgrims each year. Many pilgrims seek miraculous cures at the famous grotto where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared before 14 year old Bernadette Soubirous in a series of 18 visions between February and July 1858. Lourdes was a small rural town in the first half of the nineteenth century, but it developed rapidly as a pilgrimage centre after 1858. By 1872 more than 60,000 people had visited the site, and by 1908 the total had passed a million. In 1958 - the centenary of the visions - a record number of 4.8 million people visited the shrine. During the early 1980s an average of about 4 million pilgrims visited the shrine at Lourdes, compared with about a million visitors to Europe's other major Mary shrine at Fatima in Portugal. Between 1858 and the early 1980s, it is estimated that more than 200 million pilgrims had been to Lourdes.

In its early years Lourdes attracted mainly local believers, but now it attracts pilgrims from around the world. Six out of ten organised visitors in 1979 were foreign (compared with less than one in ten in 1895), and in 1978 visitors came from 111 different countries. Nine countries in West Europe accounted for almost all (97 per cent) of pilgrims in 1978 (Figure 8.11); France providing just over a third (37 per cent) of the total. On a per capita basis (the number of pilgrims per 1,000 Catholics) Ireland, Belgium and Britain provide more pilgrims to Lourdes than does France.

Most pilgrims (71 per cent in 1978) travel to the shrine on their own. Others go with small groups organised by private travel agencies, youth organisations and various religious institutions (11 per cent), or in large groups - often more than 1,000 people - organised by national agencies (about 18 per cent). Over two-thirds (69 per cent) of the pilgrims are female, and two out of three members of large organised groups are over 45 years of age. Labourers and rural people are strongly represented, while self-employed and highly educated people are under-represented. A small proportion (2

per cent in 1978) of the pilgrims is physically disabled, although this group grew significantly in size during the 1970s and comes mainly (65 per cent) from beyond France.

The pilgrim traffic to Lourdes is strongly seasonal. Most pilgrims visit between April and October, when weather conditions are most suitable for open-air activities at the shrine. This seasonality is reflected in the pattern of air and road traffic, and in the volume of postcards and letters handled by the local post office. Pilgrims travel to Lourdes by rail, bus, private car and (since 1948) by plane. In recent decades around two-thirds of all pilgrims arrived by train. The development of modern and faster means of transport, better mass transportation, and organised pilgrimages in recent years have all contributed to a marked increase in the numbers of pilgrims.

The religious centre of Lourdes is the 'Domain of the Grotto'. This contains the grotto of the Marian Apparition, a spring and baths, a 3-story basilica built over the baths, and the subterranean Basilica of Pius X. Other prominent features of the religious landscape include the esplanade (open forecourt), hospitals and various administrative buildings. The religious area is surrounded by hotels, guest houses, and shops selling devotional articles.

By the mid-1980s Lourdes could provide 90,000 places for pilgrims to spend the night (a third of them in hotels and guest-houses, almost half in military and youth camps, and the rest in private quarters, flats, 'religious' houses, hospitals and camp sites). The growth in pilgrim traffic has been accompanied by changes in the townscape, including the widening of streets, and the renovating and demolition of old buildings. New hotels have been built, along with new public buildings (including a railroad station, town hospital, school and parish church, market halls and law courts).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Despite the relative lack of interest in religion amongst geographers, and in geography within religious studies, there are many interesting and important points of contact between the two disciplines. Spatial variations in religion within and between countries, and the global pattern of religion, are interesting in their own right because they illustrate cultural diversity. Such patterns generally reflect the interplay of many different factors, and they provide interesting opportunities for the study of the diffusion of ideas and the movement of people and the dynamics of human populations. At the smaller scale, patterns and diffusion of religion reveal interesting properties of human persistence, tolerance and motivation. But the interest extends beyond people and their belief systems, because it embraces themes such as sacred space and sacred directions. Religious beliefs also fuel religious practices which have spatial expressions, such as pilgrimage and visits to sacred places.

## **FURTHER READING**

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**TABLE 1 Summary of the global distribution of world religions in 1980**

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*number of people (millions)*

religion	Europe	Asia	Africa	America		Oceania	total
				North	Latin		
Christianity	420.9	250.2	236.3	227.2	392.2	21.5	1548.3
Islam	9.2	588.7	215.8	2.6	0.6	0.1	817.0
Hinduism	0.6	644.0	1.2	0.7	0.6	0.3	647.4
Buddhism	0.2	294.7	0.01	0.2	0.5	0.02	295.63
Judaism	1.5	7.1	0.3	7.9	1.0	0.09	17.89
□total population	499.9	3055.5	520.4	260.8	419.2	25.7	4781.0

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SOURCE: based on data in Barrett (1982)