The UN plan for the partition of Palestine in 1947, as modified by the armistice ending the 1948–49 war, allocated most of the coastal plain to Israel, whereas Jordan took most of the hills between the coastal plain and the Jordan River valley, a region generally called the West Bank (of the Jordan River). Farther north, Israel's territory extended eastward to the Jordan River valley, but Syria controlled the highlands east of the valley, known as the Golan Heights.

Jordan and Syria used the hills between 1948 and 1967 as staging areas to attack Israeli settlements on the adjacent coastal plain and in the Jordan River valley. Israel captured these highlands during the 1967 war to stop attacks on the lowland population concentrations. Israel still has military control over the Golan Heights and West Bank a generation later, yet attacks by Palestinians against Israeli citizens have continued.

**SUMMARY**

North Americans pride themselves on tolerance of religious diversity. Most North Americans are Christian, but they practice Christianity in many ways, including Roman Catholicism, many denominations of Protestantism, and other Christian faiths. In addition, North America is home to millions of Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Bahá'ís, Hindus, and other faiths. And tens of millions practice no religion. The freedom to establish a religion is a protected right.

The religious landscape looks different outside North America. One-third of the world's people are Christian, but that leaves two-thirds who are not. Around the world, people care deeply about their religion and are willing to fight other religions and governments to protect their right to worship as they choose. The growth of Islam in Europe and of Christianity in Africa shows that the religious landscape can change through migration and conversion.

Almost all religions preach a doctrine of peace and love, yet religion has been at the center of conflicts throughout history. For geographers, religion represents a critical factor in explaining cultural differences among locations as well as interrelationships between the environment and culture. Given the importance of religion to people everywhere, geographers are sensitive to the importance of accurately understanding global similarities and local diversity among religions.

The key issues of this chapter demonstrate the impact of religion in the cultural landscape. Here again are the key issues for Chapter 6:

1. **Where Are Religions Distributed?** The world has three large universalizing religions—Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, each of which is divided into branches and denominations. Hinduism is the largest ethnic religion.

2. **Why Do Religions Have Different Distributions?** A universalizing religion has a known origin and clear patterns of diffusion, whereas ethnic religions typically have unknown origins and little diffusion. Holy places and holidays in a universalizing religion are related to events in the life of its founder or prophet and are related to the local physical geography in an ethnic religion. Some religions encourage pilgrimages to holy places.

3. **Why Do Religions Organize Space in Distinctive Patterns?** Some religions have elaborate places of worship. Religions affect the landscape in other ways: Religious communities are built, religious toponyms mark the landscape, and extensive tracts are reserved for burying the dead. Some but not all universalizing religions organize their territory into a rigid administrative structure to disseminate religious doctrine.

4. **Why Do Territorial Conflicts Arise Among Religious Groups?** With Earth's surface dominated by four large religions, expansion of the territory occupied by one religion may reduce the territory of another. In addition, religions must compete for control of territory with nonreligious ideas, notably communism and economic modernization.

**CASE STUDY REVISITED / Future of Buddhism in Tibet**

When the Dalai Lama dies, Tibetan Buddhists believe that his spirit enters the body of a child. In 1937, a group of priests located and recognized a two-year-old child named Tenzin Gyatso as the fourteenth Dalai Lama, the incarnation of the deceased thirteenth Dalai Lama, Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.

The child was brought to Lhasa in 1939 when he was 4 and enthroned a year later (Figure 6-28). Priests trained the young Dalai Lama to assume leadership and sent him to college when he was 16. Daily life in Tibet was traditionally dominated by Buddhist rites. As recently as the 1950s, one-fourth of all males were monks, and polygamy was encouraged among other males to produce enough children to prevent the population from declining.

After taking control of Tibet in 1950, the Chinese Communists sought to reduce the domination of Buddhist monks in the country's daily life by destroying monasteries and temples. Farmers were...
required to join agricultural communes unsuitable for their nomadic style of raising livestock, especially yaks.

In recent years, the Chinese have built new roads and power plants to help raise the low standard of living in Tibet. The Chinese argue that they have brought modern conveniences to Tibet, including paved roads, hospitals, schools, and agricultural practices. Some monasteries have been rebuilt, but no new monks are being trained. At the same time, the Chinese have secured their hold on Tibet by encouraging immigration from other parts of China. The Chinese government opposes efforts by other countries and international organizations to encourage greater autonomy for Tibet.

The Dalai Lama has become an articulate spokesperson for religious freedom, and in 1989 he was awarded the world’s most prestigious award for peace, the Nobel Prize. Despite the efforts of the Dalai Lama and other Buddhists, though, when the current generation of priests dies, many Buddhist traditions in Tibet may be lost forever.

FIGURE 6-28 Dalai Lama’s Palace in Lhasa, Tibet.

KEY TERMS

**Animism** (p. 178) Belief that objects, such as plants and stones, or natural events, like thunderstorms and earthquakes, have a discrete spirit and conscious life.

**Autonomous religion** (p. 195) A religion that does not have a central authority but shares ideas and cooperates informally.

**Branch** (p. 171) A large and fundamental division within a religion.

**Caste** (p. 196) The class or distinct hereditary order into which a Hindu is assigned according to religious law.

**Cosmogony** (p. 188) A set of religious beliefs concerning the origin of the universe.

**Denomination** (p. 171) A division of a branch that unites a number of local congregations into a single legal and administrative body.

**Ethnic religion** (p. 170) A religion with a relatively concentrated spatial distribution whose principles are likely to be based on the physical characteristics of the particular location in which its adherents are concentrated.

**Fundamentalism** (p. 197) Literal interpretation and strict adherence to basic principles of a religion (or a religious branch, denomination, or sect).

**Ghetto** (p. 185) During the Middle Ages, a neighborhood in a city set up by law to be inhabited only by Jews; now used to denote a section of a city in which members of any minority group live because of social, legal, or economic pressure.

**Hierarchical religion** (p. 194) A religion in which a central authority exercises a high degree of control.

**Missionary** (p. 182) An individual who helps to diffuse a universalizing religion.

**Monotheism** (p. 178) The doctrine or belief of the existence of only one god.

**Pagan** (p. 182) A follower of a polytheistic religion in ancient times.

**Pilgrimage** (p. 185) A journey to a place considered sacred for religious purposes.

**Polytheism** (p. 178) Belief in or worship of more than one god.

**Sect** (p. 171) A relatively small group that has broken away from an established denomination.

**Solstice** (p. 189) Astronomical event that happens twice each year, when the tilt of Earth’s axis is most inclined toward or away from the Sun, causing the Sun’s apparent position in the sky to reach its most northernmost or southernmost extreme, and resulting in the shortest and longest days of the year.

**Universalizing religion** (p. 170) A religion that attempts to appeal to all people, not just those living in a particular location.

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY

1. Sharp differences in demographic characteristics, such as natural increase, crude birth, and migration rates, can be seen among Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Middle East and between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. How might demographic differences affect future relationships among the groups in these two regions?

2. People carry their religious beliefs with them when they migrate. Over time, change occurs in the regions from which most U.S. immigrants originate and in the U.S. regions where they settle. How has the distribution of U.S. religious groups been affected by these changes?

3. To what extent have increased interest in religion and ability to practice religious rites served as forces for unification in Eastern Europe and the countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union? Has the growing role of religion in the region fostered political instability? Explain.

4. Why does Islam seem strange and threatening to some people in predominantly Christian countries? To what extent is this attitude shaped by knowledge of the teachings of Muhammad and the Quran, and to what extent is it based on lack of knowledge of the religion?

5. Some Christians believe that they should be prepared to carry the word of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ to people who have not been exposed to them, at any time and at any place. Are evangelical activities equally likely to occur at any time and at any place, or are some places more suited than others? Why?
Some recent and classic books and articles on ethnic geography:


Key Internet sites

**www.adherents.com** Statistics on the number of adherents to religions, branches, and denominations can be controversial. Adherents.com maintains an authoritative nondenominational source of data. Statistics are provided by religion and by location. The site also notes when different sources sharply disagree about the numbers.

**www.glenmary.org** Glenmary Research Center is the principal source of information about adherents within the United States. The Center, which is affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, provides maps of the largest branch or denomination by county.

Log in to **www.mygeoscienceplace.com** for videos, interactive maps, RSS feeds, case studies, and self-study quizzes to enhance your study of Religion.