7.1 What is religion, and what role does it play in culture?
7.2 Where did the world’s major religions originate, and how do religions diffuse?
7.3 How is religion seen in the cultural landscape?
7.4 What role does religion play in political conflicts?
“When I made my first trip to the Soviet Union in 1964, the world was divided into West and East in the Cold War. I was cataloging the unique cultural landscape in my mind as my group drove along a road from Leningrad to Moscow: I was looking for evidence of communism on the landscape. The rural areas were filled with state and collective farms. To me, the most interesting aspect of the landscape was the multitude of churches in ruins.”

**Figure 7.1**
Vyshniyvolochek, Russia. A Russian Orthodox church lies in ruins in this small village in 1964.
Key Question 7.1

What is religion, and what role does it play in culture?
Field Note: Mombasa, Kenya

“Each religion approaches the disposition of the deceased in different ways, and cultural landscapes reflect religious traditions. In largely Christian, western regions, the deceased are buried in large, sometimes elaborate cemeteries. The Hindu faith requires cremation of the deceased. Wherever large Hindu communities exist outside of India, you will see crematoriums, the equivalent of a Hindu funeral home.”

Figure 7.2
Mombasa, Kenya
What Is Religion, and What Role Does It Play in Culture?

- **Religion** is “A system of beliefs and practices that attempts to order life in terms of culturally perceived ultimate priorities.”

- Religions set standards for how people “should” behave.
What Is Religion, and What Role Does It Play in Culture?

Religion manifests itself in many ways:

- Worship
- Prayer
- Rituals

- Secularism is the indifference to or rejection of religion.
Describe how religion and language affect and change each other to shape cultures. Consider what happens to a society’s religion and language when a different religion or language diffuses to the place.
Key Question 7.2

Where did the major religions of the world originate, and how do religions diffuse?
Where Did the Major Religions of the World Originate, and How Do Religions Diffuse?

Three categories based on approach to the concept of divinity:

- **Monotheistic religions**: single god

- **Polytheistic religions**: many gods

- **Animistic religions**: inanimate objects possess spirits
Major types of religion:

- **Universalizing religions:**
  - Actively seek converts
  - Believe that they offer universal appropriateness and appeal
  - Christianity, Islam, Buddhism

- **Ethnic religions:**
  - Adherents are born into the faith
  - Do not actively seek converts
  - Spatially located, Judaism the exception
Mitzvah Tanks in NYC
4 Level Analysis (Fig. 7.6, p 210-11)

**RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD**

- **CHRISTIANITY**
  - Mostly Roman Catholic
  - Mostly Protestant
  - Mostly Eastern Orthodox

- **ISLAM**
  - Sunni
  - Sunni in India
  - Shia

- **JUDAISM**
- **BUDDHISM**
  - TANTRAYANA
  - THERAVADA

- **HINDUISM**
- **BUDDHISM** and MAHAYANA

- **SHINTOISM** and MAHAYANA
- **TRADITIONAL** and SHAMANIST RELIGIONS
- **TRADITIONALIST MIXED**
Hinduism

- One of oldest religions; over 4000 years
- Originated in the Indus River Valley
- Ganges (sacred river)
- Ancient practices include ritual bathing and reincarnation
- Polytheistic
The Spread of Hinduism
Where Did the Major Religions of the World Originate, and How Do Religions Diffuse?

From the Hearth of South Asia

Buddhism

- Splintered from Hinduism 2500 years ago
- Siddhartha
- Approximately 347 million adherents

Shintoism

- Japan
- Focused on nature and ancestor worship
Field Note: Borobudur, Indonesia

“Built about 800 CE when Buddhism was diffusing throughout Southeast Asia, Borobudur was abandoned and neglected after the arrivals of Islam and Christianity and lay overgrown until uncovered and restored under Dutch colonial rule from 1907 to 1911. The monument consists of a set of intricately carved, walled terraces; the upper terraces are open. In the upper terraces stand six dozen stupas, each containing a sculpture of the Buddha in meditation, visible when you peer through the openings.”

Figure 7.9
Borobudur, Indonesia
Where Did the Major Religions of the World Originate, and How Do Religions Diffuse?

From the Hearth of the Huang He River Valley

**Taoism**
- Lao-Tsu (6th century BCE) published *Tao-te-ching* or “Book of the Way”
- Later worshipped as a god
- [Image of Lao-Tzu]

**Confucianism**
- Confucius (551 to 479 BCE)
- Confucian Classics – 13 texts that became the focus of education in China for 2000 years
- [Image of Confucius]
Where Did the Major Religions of the World Originate, and How Do Religions Diffuse?

From the Hearth of the Eastern Mediterranean

Judaism

• Teachings of Abraham (4000 years ago)
• Orthodox – retain old precepts
• Reformed – adjust practices to current times

Diffusion of Judaism

• Diaspora – spatial dispersion of members of an ethnic group
• Zionism - movement to unite Jews and establish a homeland
Where Did the Major Religions of the World Originate, and How Do Religions Diffuse?

From the Hearth of the Eastern Mediterranean

Christianity

- Teachings of Jesus (2000 years ago)
- Split from Judaism
- Church split 3rd century CE led to Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church
- Protestant reformation in 16th century challenged fundamental Roman Catholic teachings

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Where Did the Major Religions of the World Originate, and How Do Religions Diffuse?

From the Hearth of the Eastern Mediterranean

Worldwide Diffusion of Christianity

- European Colonialism (16th - 19th centuries)
- 33,000 denominations today
Islam

- Founder Muhammad (571-632 CE)
- Sacred text is the Qu’ran (Koran)
- Five pillars of Islam
- Shi’ite and Sunni

From the Hearth of the Eastern Mediterranean

Where Did the Major Religions of the World Originate, and How Do Religions Diffuse?
Where Did the Major Religions of the World Originate, and How Do Religions Diffuse?

Diffusion of Islam

• Kings used armies to spread faith across Arabian Peninsula.
• Islam later spread by trade.
• 1.57 billion followers worldwide
• The fastest-growing religion.
Where Did the Major Religions of the World Originate, and How Do Religions Diffuse?

Indigenous and Shamanist

- Indigenous
  - Local in scope
  - Reverence for nature
  - Passed down through tribes

- Shamanism
  - Community faith
  - Follow the practices and teachings of the shaman
“Arriving at the foot of erosion-carved Uluru just before sunrise it is no surprise that this giant monolith, towering over the Australian desert, is a sacred place to local Aboriginal peoples. Throughout the day, the changing sun angle alters its colors until, toward sunset, it turns a fiery red that yields to a bright orange. At night it looms against the moonlit, starry sky, silent sentinel of the gods. Just two years before this, my first visit in 1987, the Australian government had returned ‘Ayers Rock’ (named by European settlers after a South Australian political leader) to Aboriginal ownership, and reclaimed its original name, Uluru. Visitors continued to be allowed to climb the 1100 feet (335m) to the top, from where the view over the desert is awesome.”
The Rise of Secularism

- Indifference to or rejection of organized religious affiliations and idea
  - Varies greatly from country to country and within countries.
  - Antireligious ideologies can contribute to the decline of organized religions.
- Church membership figures do not accurately reflect active participation.
Migration plays a large role in the diffusion of religions, both universalizing and ethnic. As Europe becomes more secular, migrants from outside of Europe continue to settle in the region. Imagine Europe 30 years from now. Predict where in Europe secularism will be the most prominent and where religious adherence will strengthen.
Key Question 7.3

How is religion seen in the cultural landscape?
How Is Religion Seen in the Cultural Landscape?

Sacred sites

- Places or spaces people infuse with religious meaning
- Pilgrimage: Adherents voluntarily travel to a religious site to pay respects or participate in a ritual at the site

Sacred Sites of Jerusalem

- Sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims
- Wailing Wall, Temple Mount, Dome of the Rock
Sacred Sites of Jerusalem
Ardmore, Ireland

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

Credit: Mary Lee Nolan, Oregon State University
Figure 7.21
Jerusalem, Israel. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is sacred to Christians who believe it is the site where Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Inside the church, a Christian worshipper lights a candle at Jesus Christ’s tomb. © Reuters/Corbis Images.
How Is Religion Seen in the Cultural Landscape?

Landscapes of Hinduism and Buddhism

- **Hinduism**
  - Temples, shrines
  - Holy animals, ritual bathing

- **Buddhism**
  - The Bodhi (enlightenment) tree
  - Stupas: bell shaped structures that protect burial mounds
  - Pagoda

[Video: The Great Stupa Near Sanchi]
“To reach the city of Yangon, Myanmar (Burma) we had to transfer to a ferry and sail up the Rangoon River for several hours. One of Southeast Asia’s most spectacular Buddhist shrines is the golden Shwedogon Pagoda in the heart of Yangon. The golden dome (or chedi) is one of the finest in Southeast Asia, and its religious importance is striking: eight hairs of the Buddha are preserved here. Vast amounts of gold have gone into the creation and preservation of the Shwedogon Pagoda; local rulers often gave the monks their weight in gold—or more. Today, the pagoda is a cornerstone of Buddhism, drawing millions of faithful to the site. Myanmar’s ruling generals have ruined the country’s economy and continue to oppress Buddhist leaders who try to convey public grievances to the regime, even blocking international aid following the devastating impact of cyclone Nargis in May 2008. The generals have a powerful ally in the Chinese, who are building bridges and laying pipelines but who exercise little influence over the military junta.”
How Is Religion Seen in the Cultural Landscape?

Landscapes of Christianity

- Medieval Europe
  - Cathedral, church, or monastery
- Burial more commonly practiced

**Figure 7.25**

_Bordeaux, France._ Built beginning in 1472, St. Michael’s Tower rises over Bordeaux, France, marking the importance of the Catholic Church in Bordeaux’s history and culture. © H. J. de Blij.
How Is Religion Seen in the Cultural Landscape?

Landscapes of Christianity

Religious Landscapes

Zelinsky: Map identifying religious regions of the United States

(Figure 7.28, p. 232)
How Is Religion Seen in the Cultural Landscape?

Landscapes of Islam

- Alhambra Palace in Granada
- Great Mosque of Cordoba, Spain
- Prohibition against depicting the human form
  - Led to calligraphy and geometric design use
- Hajj
  - Pilgrimage to Mecca

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Figure 7.33
Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Pilgrims circle the holy Kaaba in the Grand Mosque in Mecca during the hajj. © Amel Emric/AP/Wide World Photos.
Choose a pilgrimage site, such as Mecca, Vatican City, or the Western Wall, and describe how the act of pilgrimage (in some cases by millions) alters this place’s cultural landscape and environment.
Key Question 7.4

What role does religion play in political conflicts?
What Role Does Religion Play in Political Conflicts?

Conflicts along Religious Borders

- **Interfaith** boundaries: boundaries between the world’s major faiths
  - Ex.: Christian-Muslim boundaries in Africa
- **Intrafaith** boundaries: boundaries within a single major faith
  - Ex.: Christian Protestants and Catholics, Muslim Sunni and Shi’ite
Figure 7.36

What Role Does Religion Play in Political Conflicts?

Israel and Palestine

- WWII, 1967 Arab-Israeli War, West Bank, Hamas

Nigeria

- Muslim North/Christian South

The Former Yugoslavia

- Balkan Peninsula separates the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church

Northern Ireland

- Catholics and Protestants in the North
Figure 7.39, page 243

What Role Does Religion Play in Political Conflicts?

Religious Fundamentalism and Extremism

- Religious fundamentalism
  - Beliefs are nonnegotiable and uncompromising

- Religious extremism
  - Fundamentalism carried to the point of violence
  - Fundamentalists can be extremists but this does not mean that all fundamentalists (of any faith) are extremists
What Role Does Religion Play in Political Conflicts?

Religious Fundamentalism and Extremism

**Christianity**
- Traditionalist Catholic Movement
- Protestant fundamentalism

**Judaism**
- Orthodox conservatives
- Extremist groups Kach and Kahane Chai

**Islam**
- **Jihad**: Taliban in Afghanistan
Boal’s studies in Northern Ireland demonstrate that solving a religious conflict is typically not about theology; it is about identity. You are assigned the potentially Nobel Prize–winning task of “solving” the conflict either in Northern Ireland or in Israel and Palestine. Using Boal’s example, determine how you can alter activity spaces and change identities to create the conditions for long-lasting peace in this conflict zone.