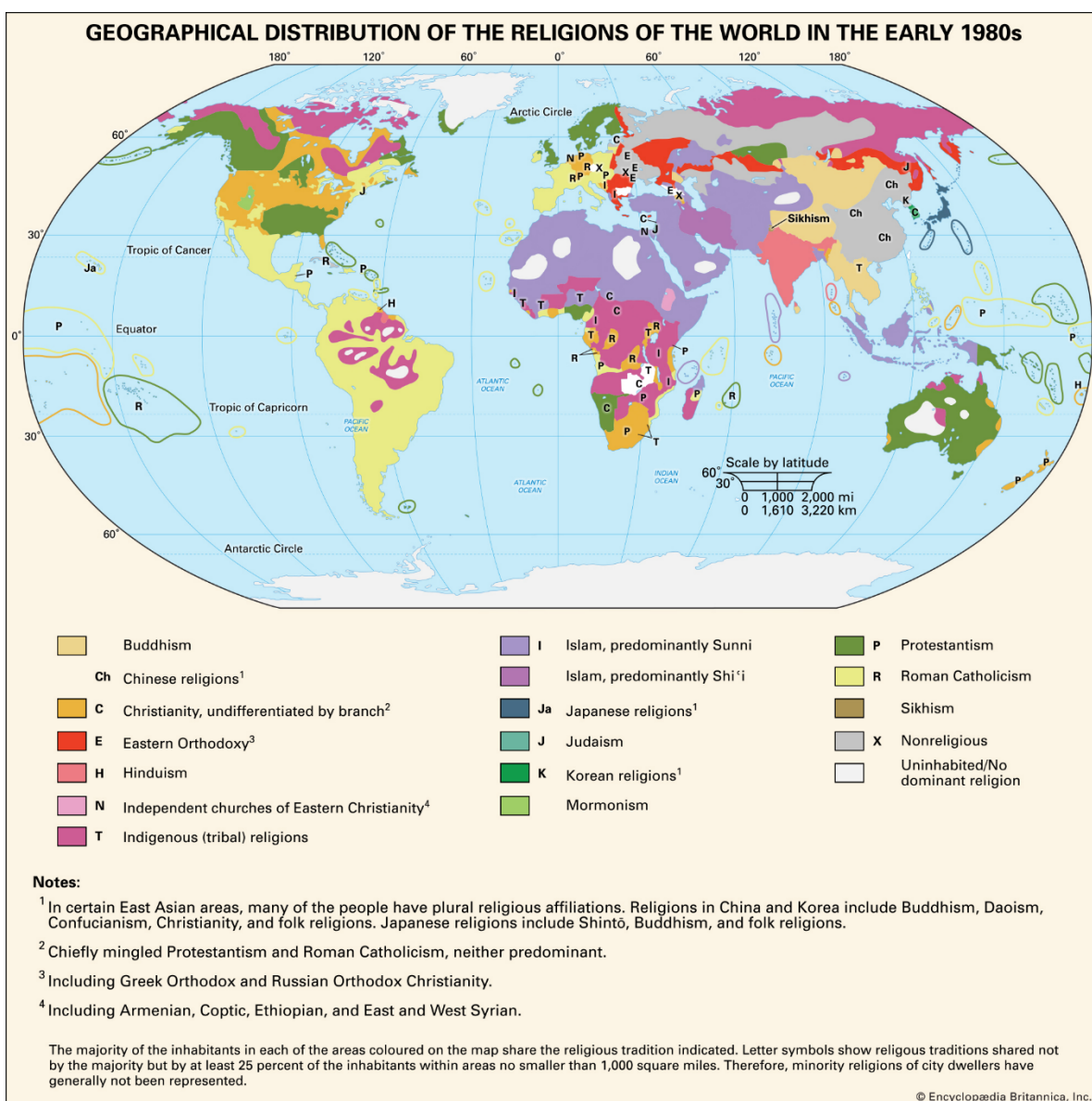


Foundational Concepts of Religion

A. Demography and Geography

- a. Over 4,300 documented religions practiced in the world
- b. 80% of the world populations identifies with or practices a religion
- c. Based on 2010 data:
 - i. Christianity – 2.2 billion
 - ii. Islam – 1.6 billion
 - iii. Hinduism – 1 billion
 - iv. Buddhism – 500 million
 - v. Folk religions – 400 million
 - vi. Judaism – 14 million



B. What is religion?

- a. Characteristics of a religion
 - i. Belief system –
 - ii. Community –
 - iii. Central myths –
 - iv. Ritual –
 - v. Emotional experiences –
 - vi. Material expression –
 - vii. Sacredness –

- b. Sacred reality
 - i. Monotheism

 - ii. Polytheism

 - iii. Pantheism

 - iv. Atheism

- c. Where does Christianity align with these characteristics? Where does it not?

- d. Symbolism
 - i. What is a symbol?

 - ii. What are some examples of symbols?

C. Why does religion exist?

- a. Natural Knowledge of God
 - i. Romans 1:18-23

 - ii. Acts 17:24-31

 - iii. Psalm 19:1-4

- b. Incomplete Knowledge
 - i. Psalm 14:1-3; Psalm 53:1-3; Romans 3:11-12

 - ii. 1 Corinthians 1:21-24

 - iii. 1 Corinthians 15:34

 - iv. Galatians 4:8-9

 - v. John 14:17b

- c. The Importance of Jesus
 - i. Matthew 16:13-19

 - ii. John 14:8-11

 - iii. John 17:3-8

D. General Patterns of Religion

Not all religions follow the exact same 'prescription' – for example, not all religions have religious texts or deities. But there are some broad commonalities in which religions exist.

- a. Focus of Beliefs and Practices
 - i. Sacramental orientation – predominant focus in most indigenous religions, Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Vedic Hinduism, Tibetan Buddhism

 - ii. Prophetic orientation – predominant focus in Judaism, Protestant Christianity, Islam

 - iii. Mystical orientation – predominant focus in Upanishadic Hinduism, Daoism, some schools of Buddhism

- b. Views of the World and Life
 - i. The Nature of Sacred Reality
 - 1. Transcendence – sacred exists primarily in a realm beyond the natural world

2. Immanence – sacred exists within nature and in humans

3. Neither – sacred does not “exist”

- ii. The Nature of the Universe

Important point – This concept will help us understand pantheistic and atheistic religions

- iii. The Human Attitude Toward Nature
 1. Spectrum of belief
 - a. Nature is a realm of evil forces in direct opposition to the nonmaterial world that must be overcome (dualism) [Jainism, Hinduism]
 - b. Nature originated from divine action, but it is not perfect due to other forces; must be changed because of these forces [Judaism, Christianity, Islam]
 - c. Nature is sacred and needs no alteration [Daoism, Shinto]

- iv. Time
 1. Linear

 2. Cyclical

 3. **Important point – our Western understanding is strictly linear. Thinking about time as cyclical can be very difficult for us to understand.**

- v. Human Purpose
 1. Humans are central part of a divine plan – (Judaism, Christianity, Islam)

 2. Humans are a small part of larger realities – (Daoism, Shinto, Confucianism)

 3. **Important point – religions typically have an “end goal” (Enlightenment, Moksha, Entry into Paradise, Salvation) – but what must one “do” to get there is different. We will revisit this concept with each religion we discuss.**

- vi. Words and Scripture
 - 1. The sacred is found in texts – connection to and learning of the divine, passing on stories and traditions, lessons on how to live life (indigenous traditions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism)
 - 2. Mistrust of words – value silence and meditation, language cannot accurately express the richness or totality of reality (Daoism and Zen Buddhism)
- vii. Exclusiveness and Inclusiveness
 - 1. Exclusiveness
 - a. Sacred is distinct from the world, order must be imposed and separate good from evil
 - b. Withdrawal from certain foods, places, people, practices, or beliefs (cannot belong to more than one religion at a time)
 - c. What are some examples of Christianity as exclusive?
 - 2. Inclusiveness
 - a. Emphasize social harmony, truth is relative, language is inadequate to describe deities and sacredness
 - b. Can belong to more than one religion
 - c. When does the Bible discuss inclusiveness (both in warning as well as in practice)?
- c. View of Male and Female
 - i. Focus on masculinity/femininity
 - 1. Men and gods are described with strength, power, leadership
 - 2. Women and goddesses are described with motherhood and fertility, nurturing
 - ii. Gender roles
 - 1. Men – spiritual leaders, head of household, providers
 - 2. Women – homemakers, childcare, submissive to men
 - iii. There are times when religions buck these trends, but there is consistent alignment with these roles across most organized religions