

Some Definitions of Religion

1. "[Religion is] the belief in Spiritual Beings" (Edward B Tylor, *Primitive Culture*)
2. "By religion, then, I understand a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life" (James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*).
3. "[Religion is] the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine." (William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*)
4. "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." (b) [Religion is] "the self-validation of a society by means of myth and ritual." (Émile Durkeim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*)
5. "[Religion is] "the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary, and a concern that in itself provides the answer to the question of the meaning of our existence." (Paul Tillich)
6. "[Religion is] a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, persuasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations.... by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." (Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System")
7. "Religion, like culture, is a symbolic transformation of experience." (Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Sociology of Religion*)
8. "[Religion is] a system of symbols (creed, code, cultus) by means of which people (a community) orient themselves in the world with reference to both ordinary and extraordinary powers, meanings, and values." (Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*)
9. "Religion is a means to ultimate transformation." (Frederick Streng, *Understanding Religious Life*)
10. [Religion is] a means of ultimate transformation and/or orientation." (Joseph Adler, "Varieties of Spiritual Experience: *Shen* in Neo-Confucian Discourse")

11. A religious tradition has at least three essential elements, each handed down and developed in the multitude of ways traditions transmit. One element is a mythic, philosophical, or theological cosmology defining the fundamental structures and limits of the world and forming the basic ways in which cultures and individuals imagine how things are and what they mean....

A second essential element of religion is ritual. Rituals are a finite set of repeatable and symbolizable actions that epitomize things a tradition takes to be crucial to defining the normative human place in the cosmos. Early layers of ritual epitomize the hunt, nurturing of agricultural fertility, acknowledgment of political authority (worship of gods as lords), acts of commitment to other individuals, and so forth....

The third essential element is that a tradition have some conception and practical procedures for fundamental transformation aimed to relate persons harmoniously to the normative cosmological elements, a path of spiritual perfection. In theisms this usually means salvation, a right relation to God. In Buddhism it means transformative enlightenment about the truth of change and suchness.... (Robert Cummings Neville, in Foreword to Rodney L. Taylor, *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism*)

Ninian Smart's Seven Dimensions of Worldviews (secular or religious)

1. Myth
2. Ritual
3. Doctrine
4. Ethics
5. Social dimension
6. Experiential dimension
7. Artistic dimension