

INTRODUCTION TO RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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Religion: Sample Definitions

religion, n.

Pronunciation: Brit. /rɪˈlɪdʒ(ə)n/ , U.S. /rəˈlɪdʒ(ə)n/ , /riˈlɪdʒ(ə)n/

1. A state of life bound by religious vows; the condition of belonging to a religious order. Also fig. Cf. to enter into religion at enter v. 8b. Chiefly in Christian contexts, esp. with reference to the Roman Catholic Church.

2. Christian Church.

a. A particular religious order or denomination; †a religious house. Also fig. Now rare.

†b. A member of a religious order, spec. a member of the clergy. Obs.

†c. Collectively: people devoted to a religious life. Obs.

3.

a. Action or conduct indicating belief in, obedience to, and reverence for a god, gods, or similar superhuman power; the performance of religious rites or observances. Also in pl.: religious rites. Now rare except as merged with sense

†b. A religious duty or obligation. Obs.

4.

a. A particular system of faith and worship. class, mystery, natural religion, etc.: see first element.

b. fig. A pursuit, interest, or movement, followed with great devotion.

†c. With the and capital initial. Chiefly in French contexts: Protestantism. Obs. (hist. in later use).

5.

a. Belief in or acknowledgement of some superhuman power or powers (esp. a god or gods) which is typically manifested in obedience, reverence, and worship; such a belief as part of a system defining a code of living, esp. as a means of achieving spiritual or material improvement. organized religion: see the first element.

b. Chiefly poet. and literary. Religion personified.

†c. Awe, dread. Obs. rare.

†6. The religious sanction or obligation of an oath or similar bond. Obs.

†7.fig. Strict fidelity or faithfulness; conscientiousness; devotion to some principle. Also: an instance of this. Obs.

- *Oxford English Dictionary*

And in these four things, opinion of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotion towards what men fear, and taking of things casual for prognostics, consisteth the natural seed of religion.

- *Thomas Hobbes*

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.

- *Émile Durkheim*

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

- *Clifford Geertz*

Religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of a meaning of our life. Therefore this concern is unconditionally serious and shows a willingness to sacrifice any finite concern which is in conflict with it.

- *Paul Tillich*

Religion, for us, is a way of life (one which embraces a total world-view, certain ethical demands, and certain social practices) that refuses to accept the secular view that sees human life as nothing more than complex bundles of atoms in an ultimately meaningless universe.

- *Ian S. Markham and Christy Lohr*