

## What IS “religion?”

**E.B. Tylor:** "It seems best. . . simply to claim as a minimum definition of Religion the belief in Spiritual Beings."

**James Frazer:** Religion began in early attempts by humans to influence nature. Religion is an intermediate stage of development between magic and science.

**William James:** “‘Religion’ means 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...*the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto.*”

**F. Schleiermacher:** Religion is "the sense and taste for the infinite."

Religion is a feeling of total dependence upon a source or power that is distinct from the world.

**Mircea Eliade:** "It is unfortunate that we do not have at our disposal a more precise term than 'religion' to denote the experience of the sacred."

**Rudolf Otto:** Religions emerge from a mysterious encounter with the sacred. The “sacred” is: “*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*” (“**a mystery that causes trembling and fascination**”)

**Emile Durkheim:** Religion is "a system of ideas with which individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members and the obscure but intimate relations which they have with it."

"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."

**Sigmund Freud:** "Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity; like the obsessional neurosis of children, it arose out of the Oedipus complex, out of the relation to the father."

**Clifford Geertz:** Religion is (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.

**Jesse Ventura:** "Religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers.”

**Stephen L. Carter:** “When I refer to religion, I will have in mind a tradition of group worship (as against individual metaphysic) that presupposes the existence of a sentience beyond the human and capable of acting outside of the observed principles and limits of natural science, and further, a tradition that makes demands of some kind on its adherents.”

**Helmut Koester:** “Religion is Story and Ritual.”

**Friedrich Engels:** “All religion...is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces.”

**Karl Marx:** “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”

**Paul Tillich:** *"Religious is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern"*

**Bob Dylan:** “Well, if you believe in something long enough you just naturally come to think it's true. There ain't no wall you can't cross over, ain't no fire you can't walk through. Well, believing is all right, just don't let the wrong people know what it's all about. They might put the evil eye on you, use their hidden powers to try to turn you out.”

**Joni Mitchell:**

Well, I looked at the granite markers.  
Those tributes to finality – to eternity.  
And then I looked at myself here.  
Chicken scratching for my immortality.  
In the church they light the candles.  
And the wax rolls down like tears  
There is the hope and the hopelessness  
I've witnessed thirty years  
We're only particles of change I know, I know.  
Orbiting around the sun