

## **Definitions of Religion by Selected Social Scientists**

### **Anthropology 1130**

Tylor (*Primitive Culture*, 1871)

... the belief in spiritual beings.

Emile Durkheim (*Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1915)

... a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set aside and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.

James Frazer (*Golden Bough*, 1922)

... 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.

Paul Radin (*Primitive Religion*, 1957)

... it consists of two parts: the first an easily definable, if not precisely specific feeling; and the second certain acts, customs, beliefs, and conceptions associated with this feeling.

Anthony Wallace (*Religion: An Anthropological View*, 1966)

... a set of rituals, rationalized by myth, which mobilizes supernatural powers for the purposes of achieving or preventing transformations in the state of man and nature.

Clifford Geertz (*The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973)

Religion is 1) a system of symbols which act 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.

Sherry Ortner (*Sherpas Through Their Rituals*, 1978)

... a metasystem that solves problems of meaning ... generated in large part ... by the social order ...

(Key Reference: Eller, Jack David. 2007. *Introducing Anthropology of Religion*. New York: Routledge.)