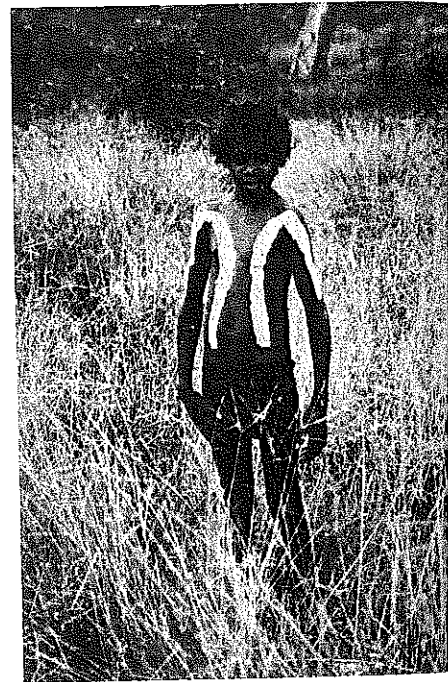


Selection **1**

ANTHROPOLOGY



Preview

The author's main purpose is to describe Western religions.

agree disagree

The overall pattern of organization is comparison-contrast.

agree disagree

After reading this, I will need to explain the rites of passage.

agree disagree

Learning Strategy

Be able to define and explain the importance of the different religious rituals and ceremonies.

Word Knowledge

Review the ten vocabulary items that follow the selection. Seek an understanding of unfamiliar words.

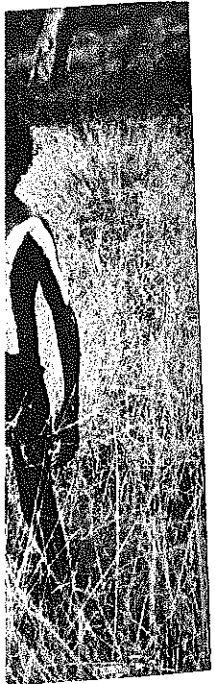
*Activate Schema**Why is a funeral a significant ritual for the loved ones?***THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH
TO RELIGION**William A. Haviland, from *Anthropology*, 4th ed.

The persistence of religion in the face of Western rationalism clearly reveals that it is a powerful and dynamic force in society. Although anthropologists are not qualified to pass judgment on the metaphysical truth of any particular religion, they can attempt to show how each religion embodies a number of "truths" about humans and society.

Anthony F. C. Wallace has defined religion as "a set of rituals, rationalized by myth, which mobilizes supernatural powers for the purpose of achieving or preventing transformations of state in man and nature."¹ What lies behind this definition is a recognition that people, when they cannot deal with serious problems that cause them anxiety through technological or organizational means, try to do so through the manipulation of supernatural beings and powers. This requires ritual, which Wallace sees as the primary phenomenon of religion, or "religion in action." Its major function is to reduce anxiety and keep confidence high, all of which serves to keep people in some sort of shape to cope with reality. It is this that gives religion survival value.

Religion, then, may be regarded as beliefs and patterns of behavior by which people try to control the area of the universe that is otherwise beyond their control. Since no known culture, our own included, has achieved complete certainty in controlling the universe, religion is a part of all known cultures. There is, however, considerable variability here. At one end of the human spectrum are hunting and gathering peoples, whose scientific knowledge about the universe is limited, and who tend to see themselves more as part of, rather than masters of, nature. This is a naturalistic world view. Among hunters and gatherers religious behavior is apt to be an integral part of day-to-day behavior. At the other end of the human spectrum is Western civilization with its wealth of scientific knowledge and its commitment to overcoming problems through technological and organizational skills. Here, religion is less a part of daily activities and tends to be restricted to specific occasions. Even so, there is variation. Religious activity may be less important to social elites, who see themselves as more in control of their own destinies, than it is to peasants or members of lower classes. Among them, religion may afford some compensation for a dependent status in society. It may also rationalize the system in such a way

¹Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 107.



erent religious rituals

n. Seek an

35 that these people may not seek to change their lot; after all, if there is hope for a better existence after death, then one may be more willing to put up with hard times in this life.

The Practice of Religion

Much of the value of religion comes from the activities called for by its practice. Participation in religious ceremonies may bring a sense of personal transcendence, a wave of reassurance, security, and even ecstasy, or a
40 feeling of closeness to fellow participants. Although the rituals and practices of religions vary considerably, even those rites that seem to us most bizarrely exotic can be shown to serve the same basic social and psychological functions.

45 **Rituals and Ceremonies** Religious ritual is the means through which persons relate to the sacred; it is religion in action. Not only is ritual the means by which the social bonds of a group are reinforced and tensions relieved, it is also one way that many important events are celebrated and crises, such as death, are made less socially disruptive and less difficult for
50 the individuals to bear. Anthropologists have classified several different types of ritual, among them **rites of passage**, which pertain to stages in the life cycle of the individual, and **rites of intensification**, which take place during a crisis in the life of the group, serving to bind individuals together.

Rites of passage: In one of anthropology's classic works, Arnold Van
55 Gennep analyzed the rites of passage which usher individuals through the crucial crises of their lives, such as birth, puberty, marriage, parenthood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death.² He found it useful to divide ceremonies for all of these life crises into three stages: **separation, transition; and incorporation**. The individual would
60 first be ritually removed from the society as a whole, then isolated for a period, and finally incorporated back into society in his or her new status.

Van Gennep described the male initiation rites of Australian aborigines. When the time for the initiation is decided by the elders, the boys are taken
65 from the village, while the women cry and make a ritual show of resistance. At a place distant from the camp, groups of men from many villages gather. The elders sing and dance, while the initiates act as though they are dead. The climax of this part of the ritual is a bodily operation, such as
circumcision or the knocking out of a tooth. Anthropologist A. P. Elkin says,

70 This is partly a continuation of the drama of death. The tooth-knocking, circumcision or other symbolical act "killed" the novice; after this he does not return to the general camp and normally may not be seen by any woman. He is dead to the ordinary life of the tribe.³

²Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

³A. P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1964).

The novice may be shown secret ceremonies and receive some instruction during this period, but the most significant element is his complete removal from society. In the course of these Australian puberty rites, the initiate must learn the tribal lore; he is given, in effect, a "cram course." The trauma of the occasion is a pedagogical technique which ensures that he will learn and remember everything; in a nonliterate society, effective teaching methods of this sort are necessary for both individual and group survival.

On his return to society, the novice is welcomed with ceremonies as though he had returned from the dead. This alerts the society at large that the individual has a new status—that they can expect him to act in certain ways and in return must act in the appropriate ways toward him. The individual's new rights and duties are thus clearly defined. He is spared, for example, the problems of "American teenage," a time when an individual is neither adult nor child but a person whose status is ill defined.

Rites of intensification. Rites of intensification are those rituals that mark occasions of crisis in the life of the group rather than individual. Whatever the precise nature of the crisis—a severe lack of rain which threatens crops in the fields, the sudden appearance of an enemy war party, or some other force from outside which disturbs everyone—mass ceremonies are performed to allay the danger to the group. What this does is to unite people in a common effort in such a way that fear and confusion yield to collective action and a degree of optimism. The balance in the relations of all concerned, which has been upset, is restored to normal.

While the death of an individual might be regarded as the ultimate crisis in the life of an individual, it is as well a crisis for the entire group, particularly if the group is small. A member of the group has been removed, and so its equilibrium has been upset. The survivors, therefore, must readjust and restore balance. They must, at the same time, reconcile themselves to the loss of someone to whom they were emotionally tied. Funerary ceremonies, then, can be regarded as rites of intensification that permit the living to express in nondisruptive ways their upset over the death, and that provide for social readjustment. A frequent feature of such ceremonies is an ambivalence to the dead person. For example, one of the parts of the funerary rites of Melanesians was the eating of the flesh of the dead person. This ritual cannibalism, witnessed by anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, was performed with "extreme repugnance and dread and usually followed by a violent vomiting fit. At the same time it is felt to be a supreme act of reverence, love and devotion."⁴ This custom, and the emotions accompanying it, clearly reveal the ambiguous attitude toward death: on the one hand, there is the desire to maintain the tie to the dead person, and on the other hand, one feels disgust and fear at the

⁴Malinowski, p. 50.

115 transformation wrought by death. According to Malinowski, funeral ceremonies provide an approved collective means of expressing these individual feelings, while at the same time maintaining social cohesiveness and preventing disruption of society.

120 The performance of rites of intensification does not have to be limited to times of overt crisis. In regions where the seasons differ enough so that human activities must change accordingly, they will take the form of annual ceremonies. These are particularly common among horticultural and agricultural people, with their planting, first fruit, and harvest ceremonies. These are critical times in the lives of people in such societies, and the
 125 ceremonies express a reverent attitude toward the forces of generation and fertility in nature on which peoples' very existence depends. If all goes well, as it often does at such times, participation in a happy situation reinforces group involvement. It also serves as a kind of dress rehearsal for serious crisis situations; it promotes a habit of reliance on supernatural
 130 forces through ritual activity which can be easily activated under stressful circumstances when it is important not to give way to anxiety and fear. /1548

■ Comprehension Questions

After reading the selection, answer the following questions with *a, b, c, or d*. Indicate the type of each question and the error type for each distractor.

- _____ 1. The best statement of the main idea is _____ (Question Type)
- a. anthropologists have classified religious rituals into three primary types. _____ (Error Type)
 - b. tribal rituals incorporate trauma as an effective teaching method to insure survival. _____
 - c. anthropologists view religion as a set of beliefs and rituals that serve social and psychological functions. _____
 - d. religions vary in their practices and rituals. _____
- _____ 2. According to the author, in Western civilization the social elite _____ (Question Type)
- a. have a naturalistic view of religion. _____ (Error Type)
 - b. are more apt to make religion an integral part of their day-to-day behavior. _____
 - c. use religion to compensate for their dependent status in society. _____

(Error Ty
correct
detail
too broad
detail

wrong
wrong
correct
wrong

false
correct
false
false

true
true
true
correct

d. feel more in control of their future and thus put less emphasis on religion.

3. An example of rites of intensification is _____ (Question Type)
- a. marriage. _____ (Error Type)
 - b. lack of rain. _____
 - c. puberty. _____
 - d. circumcision. _____

■ Skill Development: Question Construction

Create your own answers and distractors for the following questions. Insert your responses according to the error types provided. Make each distractor seem like a plausible answer.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>(Error Types)</p> <p><i>correct</i></p> <p><i>detail</i></p> <p><i>too broad</i></p> <p><i>detail</i></p>
<p><i>wrong</i></p> <p><i>wrong</i></p> <p><i>correct</i></p> <p><i>wrong</i></p>
<p><i>false</i></p> <p><i>correct</i></p> <p><i>false</i></p> <p><i>false</i></p>
<p><i>true</i></p> <p><i>true</i></p> <p><i>true</i></p> <p><i>correct</i></p> | <p>4. The best title for this selection is _____ (Question Types)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. _____ b. _____ c. _____ d. _____ <p>5. The author's primary purpose in this passage is _____</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. _____ b. _____ c. _____ d. _____ <p>6. The author suggests that peasants use religion to _____</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. _____ b. _____ c. _____ d. _____ <p>7. The author believes that religion serves all of the following functions except _____</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. _____ b. _____ c. _____ d. _____ |
|--|--|

ness

ited to

hat

annual

ries.

the

on and

oes

n

arsal for

ural

essful

ear. /1548

with a, b, c, or d

distractor.

Question Type)

primary types.

— (Error Type)

method to

ils that serve

elite

— (Question Type)

— (Error Type)

day-to-day

in society.

8. The author suggests that in nonliterate societies the trauma involved in the religious rituals serves to _____

false
correct
false
false

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

9. The ritual of cannibalism in the Melanesian funerary rites serves all of the following functions except _____

true
true
true
correct

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

10. As used in the passage, *ambivalence* is best defined as _____

wrong
wrong
correct
wrong

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

■ Written Response

Use information from the text to support the following statement:

Death is a rite of passage and a rite of intensification. The religious rituals of death are important both to the individual and to society.

(Use your own paper for this response.)

Before writing your response, first change this statement into a question. Then translate the question into simple terms that you can understand. Convert the translated parts into the approach that you will use to answer the question.

Question: _____

Translation: _____

Response Approach: _____