

# **Student Essay on Cult vs. Religion**

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# Essay

## Cult vs. Religion

Think about the words cult and religion. What do they mean? They seem like antonyms but aren't they almost synonyms of one another? The English language has many such pairs of words similar to cult and religion, that have similar meanings but opposite connotations.

Both a cult and a religion could be defined as a congregation who believes in one common idea. So why does the word cult evoke images of violence and torture while the word religion calls to mind scenes of peace and prayer? Because society characterizes cults as those extremist groups who practice rituals which most people don't approve of. A well-known example, the KKK or the Ku Klux Klan used to burn crosses and hang any black people or even Caucasians who helped blacks. For obvious reasons most people condemned these practices so society began to call the KKK a cult. A religion, on the other hand, is a set of spiritual beliefs to guide, enrich, and even define one's life. Christianity, Judaism, Islam and many other religions have similar, very traditional beliefs that most people respect even if they don't believe in them. Because of this acceptance, society categorizes Christianity, Judaism, Islam and other such belief systems as religions as opposed to cults. Society has bestowed opposite connotations on the words cult and religion even though, by definition, the words are almost synonyms.

So now define the words cult and religion. How much of the definition can be found in the dictionary and how much comes from the connotation of the word? By associating cults with violent and perverted murderers and associating religion with peaceful worshippers, society has given the words their contrary connotations.