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AN ANALYSIS OF CLIFFORD GEERTZ'S MODERN
STUDY OF RELIGION

BY

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of the scientific study of religion as an alternative to the theological and philosophical approaches was advanced by a number of prominent scholars and figures. Among them were Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917) and James G. Frazer (1854-1941) in the anthropology of religion, Max Weber (1864-1920) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) in the sociology of religion, and William James (1842-1910) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) in the psychology of religion. Nevertheless, Clifford Geertz's (1926-2006) modern study of religion presented an approach in the study of religion that is quite different from his predecessors. While his predecessors look for stable patterns in religious phenomena, Geertz looks for the meanings that inform the worldview and ethos that construct these phenomena. This research will look at Geertz's conceptual and methodological frameworks and see how these were applied into his study of religion, Islam in particular. This research will attempt to gauge the feasibility of Geertz's study of religion for its practical application in case studies of particular religions.

ملخص البحث

(1917-1832) . ()
(1941-1854)
(1917-1858) (1920-1864)
(1939-1856) (1910-1842)
(2006-1026) .

ABSTRAK

Kemunculan kajian saintifik agama sebagai suatu alternatif bagi pengajian berbentuk teologi dan falsafah telah digagaskan oleh sebilangan sarjana-sarjana dan ilmuwan-ilmuwan yang tersohor, seperti: Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917) dan James G. Frazer (1854-1941) dalam kajian antropologi agama, Max Weber (1864-1920) dan Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) dalam kajian sosiologi agama dan William James (1842-1910) dan Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) dalam kajian psikologi agama. Kendatipun begitu, kajian moden agama oleh Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) mempersembahkan panorama yang berbeza dan unik berbanding pemuka-pemuka awal yang lain. Sementara pendahulu-pendahulunya cuba mengkaji satu corak yang selari dalam fenomena keagamaan, Geertz pula lebih menumpukan kajiannya kepada maksud-maksud yang mewakili pandangan sarwa dan etos yang membentuk fenomena ini. Kajian ini akan melihat secara khusus terhadap konsep dan metodologi yang telah beliau gagaskan berserta aplikasinya dalam kajian agama, terutamanya terhadap agama Islam. Kajian ini akan menaksir keabsahan langkah-langkah yang telah Geertz perkenalkan dalam kajian agama, untuk melihat aplikasi praktikalnya dalam kajian bagi agama-agama tertentu secara spesifik.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion; it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion).

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Muhammad Yamin Azrai Cheng
Supervisor

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion; it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion).

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Sciences

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi Bin Wan Razali

Signature.....

Date.....

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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**AN ANALYSIS OF CLIFFORD GEERTZ'S
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*To my beloved brothers and sisters in Islam, may Allah guide us in our pursuit
of success in this world and for the hereafter from this humble work.*

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This research topic is inspired from my postgraduate course titled *Western Scholarship in Comparative Religion* which I took with Dr. Muhammad Yamin Azrai Cheng. From this course, I became aware of the pertinence to be acquainted with western methods in the study of religion that, although they were skeptical of religious truth, their methods were of immense significance in providing contexts and building blocks to comprehend religion in human experience. I wish to record my gratitude to Dr. Cheng for rousing my interest in this subject and to agree to supervise my research on this area of religious study.

I must also thank the Department of Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, and the Center for Postgraduate Studies, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), for their numerous supports toward the fulfilling and completing of my postgraduate studies at the IIUM.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The modern study of religion began as a Western intellectual phenomenon during the time of the Enlightenment in the 17th century CE and extending into the 21st century CE.

There are conflicting views regarding when the modern period began, but at the intellectual level, scholars generally agree that the Enlightenment is the best period to describe the modern era. This is because this period is the culmination of a long series of development at the intellectual level that began with the Renaissance, then the Reformation, and later the Scientific Revolution. By the time of the Enlightenment, the moment was ripe to replace the old intellectual orientation with a new one.

This new intellectual orientation is one where reason takes over from revelation and dogmas in the search for reality, truth, and purpose of existence. Reason has two forms. One is known as speculative reason while the other is known as empirical reason. In its more technical terms, speculative reason is rationalism while empirical reason is empiricism. Rationalism is reasoning through logical analysis while empiricism is reasoning through factual analysis.

A study of religion is considered modern when the inquiry into a religious question proceeds from either a rational point of view or a factual point of view, and not from a theological, or dogmatic, or scriptural point of view. For example, on the question concerning the existence of God, a theological, or dogmatic, or scriptural

response would produce an answer from a source that is said to be divine revelation, and not the product of human imagination. Also, the answer is considered true and is beyond all questions. A rational answer, on the other hand, would seek causal relationship that will establish the existence of God. However, the answer would be considered an idea, and not necessarily a reality. A factual answer will only attempt to gather data concerning what people in a particular civilization accept as 'God.' The answer may range from a monotheistic God, to ghosts and dead ancestors. Truth is not relevant here. Only the meaning is important.

It is pertinent to understand the modern study of religion because our perception of religion today, in one way or another, has been shaped by it. The numerous textbooks on world religions that are used by students all over the world, including in Muslim countries such as Malaysia, are testimony to this impact.

Irrespective of whether the contents or findings of a study of a particular religious phenomenon reflect their actual state, these contents and findings have influenced perceptions of people that also include politicians and policy makers who decide on matters that will have serious impact on others.

Therefore, whether one agrees with the modern methods in the study of religion, or their contents and findings, to be familiar with them is paramount to understand how religion has been perceived today, whether by Muslims or non-Muslims alike.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Between the rational and empirical or scientific method in the modern study of religion, the empirical method has gained the upper hand in the application of its

method into the study of religion. This was due mainly to the successes of modern science with its empirical method in the study of Nature.

Thus, it was the changes in the philosophy of science that influenced this impact. The scientific method which lies behind the practical achievements of modern science had for sure influenced the approaches to the study of religion.¹

As to what the scientific method in the study of religion is, John Milton Yinger (b. 1916), a contemporary scholar of religion, had defined the scientific study of religion as “the simultaneously anthropological, psychological, and sociological approach to the study of religion; that is, it must deal with the individual forces, the cultural systems, and the social structures that in interaction, shape religion and are shaped by it.”²

The application of the ‘scientific method’ denotes a dramatic change as the field has expanded beyond the traditional confines of theology and philosophy, and to become part of modern disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and psychology.³

In other words, the modern study of religion relies on the application of disciplines from the social sciences in its attempt to understand the various aspects of religion or religions.⁴ In this century, we can find many writings of the modern intellectuals promoting and explaining human religious phenomena from their own specialties. In this sense, we could see that some of these scholars would recognize the main roles played by religion in human life, whilst some would degrade it to the

¹ Frank Whaling, “Additional Note on Philosophy of Science and the Study of Religion,” in *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion in 2 Volumes: Volume I the Humanities*, edited by Frank Whaling, (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers, 1985) 1:379.

² John Milton Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1970), vii.

³ Graham Cunningham, *Religion & Magic: Approaches and Theories*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), vii.

⁴ See: Ninian Smart, *Encyclopedia Britannica 2006 Ultimate Reference Suite DVD*, “study of religion”.

lowest level of degradation, where religion is perceived as aimless and useless for the human development in social life, economics, international relations and many others.

For instance, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), an Austrian physician, psychologist and father of psychoanalysis (a system of personality and theory of psychotherapy) had once delved into this particular field of psychology and had written some writings on it, such as *Totem and Taboo* (1913), *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). By using psychological methods for his analysis and study of religion, he introduced the modern study of religion from the perspective of psychology.

Emilé Durkheim (1858-1917), a French sociologist and one of the founders of modern sociology, had incredibly analyzed the meaning of ‘sacred,’ ‘religiosity’ and ‘social cohesion’ in relation to religion or religions in his *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). His application of the scientific method in the sociological studies of religion is very much praised as well as created a firm landmark to be followed and imitated by sociologists after him, especially in the modern study of religion from the sociological point of view.

The choice of Clifford Geertz (1926-2006; cited hereafter as Geertz) as the research topic for this dissertation is prompted by John Milton Yinger’s characterization of the modern study of religion that can no longer ignore the interdisciplinary approach in its study. Both Freud and Durkheim were concerned only with their respective approach in the modern scientific study of religion. The former looked at it from the psychological point of view, and the latter from a sociological point of view.

Freud and Durkheim lived at a time when the scientific study of the human dimension had just made its appearance and each was only concerned with a fraction

out of the total outlook of the human phenomenon. Religion, now being studied as a part of the human phenomenon, was also affected by this new development. Therefore, it would only be natural to find that for Freud, religion is studied as a psychological phenomenon, and for Durkheim, as a sociological phenomenon.

Geertz, on the other hand, appeared at a time when the piecemeal approach to the study of religion had come under heavy criticism, such as that by Yinger. As such, the choice of Geertz for this dissertation is made based on the consideration of the interdisciplinary approach taken by Geertz in the study of religion.

This research attempts to look at Geertz's modern study of religion in two aspects. First, how does Geertz formulate his modern approach to religion that he characterized as comparative, macro-sociological, and historical? In other words, to what extent are the components of Yinger's scientific study of religion that include psychological (individual forces), anthropological (cultural systems), and sociological (social structures) present in his method of study? Second, how effective is his application of his method in the study of religion in a case study?

In looking at these two issues, Geertz's book *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* will be made the primary focus of investigation because it is in this book that Geertz outlined and discussed more in-depth and more thorough his method of study of religion and also the application of his method into the study of particular societies, namely Morocco and Indonesia.

Therefore, the choice of Geertz for this dissertation is made on the following grounds:

- To examine Geertz's arguments of a modern scientific study of religion that can produce accurate information on the religion of a particular society and culture.

- To analyze Geertz's application of his scientific study of religion into his case studies, namely the societies of Morocco and Indonesia.
- To assess the implications of Geertz's method in the study of religion on the understanding of religion in general, and on Islam in particular. This includes the extent of its usefulness in interpreting religious aspects to the religious seekers.

1.3 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The choice of Geertz for this research on the modern study of religion is justified on the following grounds:

1.3.1 His Unique Method of Study

His unique method in treating religion as his focus of study was shaped through his exceptional academic development in numerous fields, namely, literature, philosophy and anthropology. By combining philosophy and anthropology in the study of humankind, he embarked more on the 'why', instead only on the 'what' and 'how' aspects of studies. For that reason, he lucidly subscribed his method as historical, macro-sociological, and comparative. In short, he attempts to bring together the speculative and the empirical methods into his social scientific study of religion.

Furthermore, in his own confession, Geertz admitted that his approaches in *Islam Observed* were interestingly his reaction -either accepting or rejecting- to the methods and concepts of some celebrated figures in social sciences and religious studies, such as Talcott Parsons (1902-1979), Clyde Kluckhohn (1905-1960), Edward

Shils (1911-1995), Robert N. Bellah (b. 1927), Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000), Max Weber (1864-1920) and many others.

1.3.2 The Result of His Findings

The fundamental idea of his findings is to stress on the ‘thick description’ for an interpretive theory of culture. Therefore, he believed that the study of religion should operate in two stages. **First**, an analysis of the system of meanings embodied in the symbols which make up the religion proper, and **second**, relation of these systems to social-structural and psychological processes.

In *Islam Observed*, he applied the above two stages in his study of Islam in Morocco and Indonesia and managed to discern their development through these aspects, namely, the ethos, worldview, symbols (rituals and myths), ‘force’, ‘scope’ and others.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are:

- 1) To understand the emergence, consequence, impact, and implication of the modern approach to the study of religion as it is reflected in its social scientific character through the various disciplines of the social sciences, and especially its relation to the study of Islam.
- 2) To explore the contribution of Geertz to the modern social scientific study of religion in terms of his discourses on the problem of truth and meaning in religion; particularly with regard to his study of Islam.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) What were the causes behind the emergence of the modern study of religion?

The modern study of religion coincided with the emergence of the scientific study of religion. The study of religion is considered modern if it adopts the scientific method in its investigation into religious phenomena. Because Geertz claims that his method is a scientific method of study, an understanding of what is considered scientific method is pertinent to understand Geertz's claim. In looking at the question of the emergence and application of the scientific method into the study of religion, attention will be given to these matters:

- The scientific method studies only things perceptible to the senses, whereas religion deals with the previous and also matters that are beyond the dimension of the senses. If this is the case, what arguments have been forwarded for the viability of the scientific method in the study of religion? Are religious phenomena also regarded as empirical phenomena?
- If the assumption that religious phenomena are regarded as sense data, how has the scientific method been used by the proponents of this method before Geertz's time, such as Durkheim (sociology), E.B. Tylor (1832-1917) (anthropology), or Freud (psychology), to study them, and were their outcomes?

2) What is the nature of Geertz's modern scientific method?

After a general survey on the background of the emergence and application of the scientific method in the study of religion before Geertz's time is attempted, the question will proceed to address Geertz's method itself. In particular, this question will look into the following matters:

- How has Geertz's educational background in literature, philosophy and anthropology shaped his scientific approach to the study of religion?
- How does Geertz justify his method which he calls 'interpretive theory of culture' that to him is 'historical, macro-sociological, and comparative' as scientific? Can an interpretive method that is subjective be treated as objective, the very claim of the scientific method? How does Geertz address the problem of interpretation versus laws in his claim of his method of study as scientific?

3) How feasible is Geertz's modern scientific method in the study of religion?

This question will look into the feasibility of Geertz's method of study to the information it yields on our understanding of religion. For this purpose, this question will look into a particular research of Geertz, namely his book titled *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*.

This book is chosen for three reasons. **First**, in this book, Geertz discusses his method of religious study. Geertz has discussed his definition of religion as a cultural phenomenon in one of his essays. This essay will also be used to explore further his understanding of religion in which he treated in greater depth in his book. **Second**, this book is Geertz's demonstration of his method as it is applied into a particular case study. Through this book, an assessment of the feasibility of his method of study, and impliedly, the modern scientific in the study of religion, can be made. **Third**, since the particular case study that he had chosen is Islam, this will be of immense significance to any Muslim's understanding of his or her religion, as it is given through a method of study that is peculiar to the present age and time, irrespective of whether the information it yields is accurate or not.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data can be collected in a variety of ways, in different settings, and from different sources. However, this study will mainly focus on the qualitative primary data collection. There is a need of conducting a library research; comprising the academic journals related to this study, published books, and some official websites in order to gather the most information available for this study. A revision of books will also be conducted, be the language of the books are Malay, English or Arabic, which are especially written by Geertz or on Geertz's modern study of religion. In sum, this research involves the following methods:

1.6.1 Descriptive Method

This method will be used to trace, scrutinize and explain the intellectual background of Geertz and his discourses on the anthropological study of religion. The application of this method is very paramount before undertaking any other methods. Furthermore, this method will also assist in describing Geertz's modern method of studying Islam in both countries, namely: Morocco and Indonesia. Concurrently, this method too will offer the factual information for this study, which stands as the basis for the second method, i.e. the analytical method.

1.6.2 Analytical Method

This method will be used to critically analyze Geertz's most crucial views and ideas in this study and to give preference to some over others. The researcher may also present his own opinions on those views and ideas. In precise, the application of this second method will provide the analytical assessment of Geertz's modern method of

studying religion, critical evaluation of Geertz's approaches in studying Islam in both countries and a fair presentation on the practicability and usefulness of his method regarding the portrayal of Islam.

1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a number of works discussing Geertz's modern study of religion. Some of the literatures are very appreciative and reflective of his contributions, while others are being relatively critical of his ideas. Geertz's perspective on the modern study of religion has been studied and considered by a number of thoughtful researchers and authors. Their results can be different from one another based on their focuses, approaches and disciplines. As far as it can be ascertained, there has been little analysis on Geertz's modern study of religion from the perspective that is focusing on its feasibility and usefulness in the study of religion, especially in relation to the study of Islam. The lack of such analysis raises questions and wonders about the modern study of religion, particularly as proposed by Geertz himself.

In the analysis of Brian Morris, an Emeritus Professor of the University of London, he described:

In his excellent comparative and historical study *Islam Observed* (1968), Geertz explores religious developments in Indonesia and Morocco, having undertaken researches in the ancient walled city of Sefran (1964-66) (see Geertz 1979). He explicitly describes the study as an exercise in macrosociology, both historical and comparative in the style of Weber, thus avoiding, he suggests, the "pallid mindlessness" of cultural relativism (the kind of interpretive understanding he had earlier advocated) and the "shabby tyranny" of historical determinism (by which he presumably means the kind of analysis suggested by Marx and Engels). He begins the book by suggesting that the aim of a scientific study of religion is not just to describe ideas and institutions but to determine how these sustain or inhibit religious faith and to ascertain "what happens to faith when its vehicle alters" (2). His focus therefore is

specifically on religious beliefs and institutions, rather than upon the relationship between religion and social life.⁵

The same was also done in his update and sequel to the previous text, namely: *Religion and Anthropology: A Critical Introduction*, where he applied only the descriptive method in conveying Geertz's anthropological views on religion and Islam in particular.⁶

Next, Daniel L. Pals, a Professor of Religious Studies and History at The University of Miami had classified Geertz's *Islam Observed* as one of his interpretive action in his comparative study of **two kinds of Islam**. In 31 pages of expatiating Geertz's idea of religion as a cultural system, he deliberately described *Islam Observed* as a particularly good illustration of Geertz's approach to religion primarily because of what it does not do, i.e. it does not offer a crisp logical argument in defense of a definite thesis about religion, Islamic or otherwise. It is instead a kind of exploration, a journey into cultural systems led by a guide who is too interested in describing landscapes and comparing one with another to care whether the path he is traveling will ever reach a destination.⁷ By adding some good points on Geertz's biographical background, his theoretical exposition, conceptual analysis and critical assessment on his anthropological study of religion; Pals had succeeded to cover the important aspect of understanding Geertz's modern study of religion. Nevertheless, in sum, he failed to raise the feasibility of Geertz's methodology with its extent of adaptability.

Likewise, Taufik Abdullah from the Indonesian Institute of Social Sciences had recognized and listed some issues in *Islam Observed* at the preface of a translated

⁵ Brian Morris, *Anthropological Studies of Religion: An Introductory Text*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 318.

⁶ Brian Morris, *Religion and Anthropology: A Critical Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 104-111.

⁷ Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 282.

edition of this book into Indonesian Malay Language. As a point of understanding this book, he stressed on how Geertz prescribed the cultural study, religion as the subject of anthropological study, his comparative methodology and his explanation on religious structural change. Then, he also academically raised some controversies on *Islam Observed* with some points forwarded by J. Van Baal and Peter Berger.⁸ However, as only a preface of a book, everything was explicated very brief and short.

Then, in the investigation of Yme B. Kuiper, Geertz's understanding of culture has been put into examination and analysis; specifically his notion on religion as cultural symbol. In Kuiper's pursuit, he put forward the background of Geertz's type of anthropology and view on culture.⁹ Next, Richley H. Crapo had also done the same, which in precise trying to describe at length the implication of having religion as cultural system.¹⁰ By having the questions of culture as the main importance of Kuiper's and Crapo's presentation, they do not further investigate in detail the relationship between these ideas and *Islam Observed* as the manifested practices.

Similarly, in William A. Lessa's textbook, which the emphasis was mainly on Geertz's ideas on religious symbols. This approach had explained the function of religion in human society by examining the nature and efficacy of religious symbols. Simultaneously, this had also explained on his attempts to show what really religion does and also why religious symbols are well suited to fulfill these functions and precisely how they establish cultural order and meaning in the world.¹¹ Though, there

⁸ Taufik Abdullah, "C.Geertz Dan Agama Sebagai Sasaran Studi Antropologi", in Clifford Geertz, *Islam Yang Saya Amati: Perkembangan Agama Di Maroko Dan Indonesia*, translated from English by Hasan Basari, (n.p.: Yayasan Ilmu Ilmu Sosial, 1982), ix-xiv.

⁹ Yme B. Kuiper, "The Concept of Person In American Anthropology: The Cultural Perspective of Clifford Geertz," in *Concept of Person In Religion and Thought*, edited by Hans G. Kippenberg, Yme B. Kuiper and Andy F. Sanders, (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990), 37-42.

¹⁰ Richley H. Crapo, *Anthropology of Religion: The Unity and Diversity of Religions*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 21.

¹¹ William E. Lessa, and Evon Z. Vogt, *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*, (New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco and London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), 39.

The anthropological study of religion, according to Geertz, should be a two-stage operation: first an analysis of the system of meanings embodied in the symbols which make up the religion, and, second, the relating of these systems to socio-cultural and psychological processes. Geertz's treatment of religious belief, which lies at the core of his conception of religion, is a modern, privatized Christian one because and to the extent that it emphasizes the priority of belief as a state of mind: "The basic axiom underlying what we may perhaps call 'the religious perspective' is everywhere the same: he who knows must first believe" (Geertz 2000 The religion of Java. C Geertz. University of Chicago Press, 1976. 4040. 1976. The integrative revolution: primordial sentiments and civil politics in the new states. C Geertz. Old societies and new states: The quest for modernity in Asia and Africa, 1963. 3834*. 1963. "From the Native's Point of View": On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding. C Geertz. Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 26-45, 1974. 3798*. 1974. Agricultural involution: The processes of ecological change in Indonesia. C Geertz. Univ of California Press, 1963. 3659. Clifford James Geertz (August 23, 1926 – October 30, 2006) was an American cultural anthropologist, famous for his work on cultural symbols and meaning. During thirty years at Princeton University, he studied the cultures of Southeast Asia and North Africa, investigating a wide variety of social structures including economic development, political structures, family life, and religion. His emphasis has been on the symbolism that reveals the frames of meaning through which each culture views the world Clifford Geertz, American cultural anthropologist, a leading rhetorician and proponent of symbolic anthropology and interpretive anthropology. After service in the U.S. Navy in World War II (1943–45), Geertz studied at Antioch College, Ohio (B.A., 1950), and Harvard University (Ph.D., 1956). He. Home Philosophy & Religion Humanities. Clifford Geertz. American anthropologist. Print. Alternative Title: Clifford James Geertz. Clifford Geertz, in full Clifford James Geertz, (born Aug. Clifford Geertz's influential definition of religions as providing their members with both an ethos and a worldview "in his terms, both a 'model for' and 'model of' reality" has of late become a neuralgic point of contention in religious studies. In particular some critics have seen his ideas of religious models of reality as biased, out-moded, or in other ways confused about the way that language refers (or does not refer) to the world. In this article, I consider two criticisms of Geertz's project and seek to show that, despite the partial value of the criticisms, the idea of religious models