Anthropology of Religion: How the Theoretical Misconceptions Predetermine Questions That Are Asked and Answers That Can Be Given

Straipsnyje pristatoma religijos termino apibrėžties socialiniuose moksluose problematika ir iš to išplaukiančios teorinės implikacijos. Autoriai apžvelgia religijos ir pasaulio religijos konceptus, pabrėžia šių terminų sąlyginumą moksliniuose tyrinėjimuose.

Antroje straipsnio dalyje imamasi analizuoti plačiai paplitusių idėjų ir formuluočių religijos atžvilgiu rinkinį, kuriis kyla iš minėtos religijos apibrėžties ir marksistinės dialektikos taikymo religijos studijose. Autoriai teigia, jog neatsargiai ir nekritiškai taikant marksistinę dialektiką religijos tyrinėjimams kyla pavojus, kad religijos studijos kels tik tam tikrus pačiai marksistinei dialektikai aktualių ir tik jai būdingus klausimus, pateiks tik šiai teorinei prieičiai tinkamus atsakymus.

In this article the authors discuss definitional problems of the concept of religion in social science and the consequent theoretical implications that follow if these problems are underestimated. The authors begin with the overview of historical development of the concept of religion and world religion. The article brings forward definitional problems with the concept of religion and questions the scientific value of the concept of world religion.

In the second part of the article the authors discuss a set of predispositions and preconceived sociological, philosophical ideas on religion which spring from the Marxist dialectical approach. The authors analyse the limitations of this approach in studying religion and argues that if these problems are ignored, they may lead to theoretical constrains which predetermine the type of questions that can be asked and answers that can be formulated.

Introduction

Research object – the concept of religion as an anthropological category and its theoretical application in Social Science.

The aim of this article is to discuss problems concerning the sociological and anthropological theorisation of religion. We are going to overview the development of the concept of religion as a historically constructed category and discuss how it is utilised in social
science. Also we will analyse how the above mentioned misconceptions and the theoretical framework of Marxist dialectics, predetermine a kind of questions and answers that can be formulated regardless of contrary empirical evidence.

Objectives – to break the particular exemplary anthropological question into analytical categories and discuss their theoretical validity examining them against empirical data. To discuss the validity of application of Marxist dialectics in anthropological study of religion.

Methodology – historical and cross-cultural comparative analysis.

Hypothesis – The concept of religion in Social Science suffers definitional problems due to the misconceptions with the term. Philosophical preoccupation with the Marxist dialectics in the study of religion while utilising the above mentioned misconceptions, leads to the theoretical predispositions which limit the scope of a scholar and cannot stand up to contrary empirical evidence.

The introduction to the main problematicus of this article may be best illustrated with a real-life anecdotical situation. During a particular seminar at the Cambridge University’s department of Social Anthropology a peculiar discussion took place. Students had to select the topic for their set essay on religion. Among a number of questions the following was likely the most interesting one: “Why do the local expressions of a world religion so often appear to depart from its central ideals and doctrines?” Students had to answer the question referring to any of the world religions. Discussion that had taken place around the question while attempting to clarify some key concepts was interrupted by the demand that the question should be given a straightforward answer rather than talked around. We can find this case anything but unimportant because the question and the discussion altogether, if left without critical examination, trigger scholar’s false confidence regarding the concept of religion. This confidence, however, breaks apart at the very attempt to define the subject matter of the Anthropology of Religion. However, the above mentioned question presupposes the universality of the concept of religion and “world religion”; it also implies (Marxist) dialectical view as if it were a common-sense. Finally, seeking to provide a firm empirical ground for the analysis the question implies the “one size fits it all” approach by requiring an answer which equally suits for “any” of the “world religions”! Critique of this (rather frequent) approach in Anthropology of Religion is a subject matter of this article.

Since our case rests on the particular question, we are going to use it as a basis for discussing the key concepts and assumptions that cannot be left unexamined in such anthropological analysis. The specific dialectical ‘lens’ for the study of religion which is presupposed in the question, somewhat predetermines the answer. Therefore, in this article we will discuss the theoretical implications that follow from this kind of approach. We will also try to answer the given question without giving in to the constraints that it tends to set up. Before going into the more thorough analysis of the question, we are going to break down the question into analytical categories, discussing the concepts of religion and world religions. We will also analyse the presupposed by the question religion’s “departure” from its central ideas and doctrines”, as well as the assumptions about religion’s “central ideas and doctrines”.
It is necessary to begin this article by discussing these concepts that are often taken for granted and used as a prop for some too fluent sociological theories. Responding to the requirement to be particular, we will refer to Christianity. Using this strategy, we are going to show that straightforward answer to the above mentioned question is possible only by retreating to the dialectical perspective which 1) takes the concept of religion as a substantive entity and 2) depicts it as a twofold system of top-down power relations between (central) institution and ordinary (local) practitioner. However, the latter is only one of the ways to look at religious complexities. There cannot be a straightforward answer to the question discussed, if one disagrees with the very perspective it presupposes. Instead, I argue that much more valid question is not “why” but “do”. Hence, I question is there such a “departure” at all.

1. Definitional problems

1.1. The problem of the concept of religion

Before discussing the concept of the “World Religions” and avoiding any undue simplifications and generalisations we should start by discussing the concept of religion. The problem of defining religion in Anthropology seems to be as inherent as it is with a definition of culture. Every new generation of social scientists attempt to correct or supplement their predecessors, at the same time engaging a thorough debate among their contemporaries. What is necessary to have in mind is that the concept of religion, which nowadays is perceived as obvious (even in social science), has its historical development and has been used to define rather different things throughout history.

The etymology of the word ‘religion’ is quite uncertain. Cicero in his work “The Nature of Gods” uses word “religere” (in Latin re- “again”, legere- “read”), implying the meaning of mindfulness and attentiveness to details in serving gods. In other words, “religere” meant sincere and mindful care of cults of gods. However, early Christian writer Lactantius (ca. 240 – ca. 320) in his “Divinae Institutiones” held the view that Ciceronian etymology of the word has an innate threat of idolatry and suggested another word “religare” (to bind fast or to re-bind) implying the meaning of “bond” with God. This etymology later was developed by St. Augustine. In his work “De Quantitate Animea” (“About the Quantity of the Soul”) he explains that true religion is the one that helps the soul to reconcile and rebind with the God with whom it once broke up1. Since then, the word “religion”, was used to refer exceptionally to Christianity. Therefore, we can see that the medieval concept of religion bore a very different meaning compared to the contemporary understanding of it.

The changes, however, occurred with the Renaissance. The Reformation and the Catholic/Protestants struggle (i.e. on the “religious” basis) played its role in gradual essentialisation of the concept of religion. It is also necessary to mention that it was the Cambridge Platonists who where the first to develop a distinction between “religious realm” and the physical world. This new distinction gave a transitional shift from the medieval concept of religion understood within the framework of Christianity to the perception...
of “religiosity” as an innate and “natural” human state. This was the precedent that led from the understanding of religion as a “bond” with God to the understanding of it as an innate inclination towards God. This understanding appeared to be useful in dealing with then emerging concept of religious pluralism (different types of inclination towards the divine). In the seventeenth century there were four “Sects of Religion” known in the West – Christianity, Judaism, Mahometanism and paganism. Peter Harrison suggests that this paradigm shift laid a foundation for the later “dispassionate study of religion”.

Preserving what Nicolas Lash called the “late medieval passion for plain speech and single meaning”, the Renaissance thinkers rediscovered and adopted the Stoics’ views of “nature” – “a world seen as a homogeneous through and through, made of one kind of stuff and driven by one set of forces”. The “triumphant” mind and reason of the time laid a foundation for the (idea of) science, that has “unequivocal language with which it speaks and uniform objects of which it speaks”. Seeing the universe as such, it opened exciting creative possibilities for theologians, philosophers, writers and scientists of that time. Indeed, when reading the prominent Renaissance thinkers, seeing the assumptions they make and theories they develop, one is able to note their charming creativity of self-convinced mind. Lash insightfully calls this trend “a single-minded passion for pure prose”. The main intellectual disposition was: “All knowledge is of objects and objects are to be measured and described as objectively and simply and straightforwardly as possible.” Consequently, this attitude led to the creation of the symbol of the Enlightenment thought – the Encyclopaedia. Encyclopaedic thinking attempted to explain the world as a set of laws, patterns, schemes and categories. Taxonomic knowledge needed tangible definitions and clear concepts – the process that Lash called a rationalist “container thinking”.

This passionate attempt to systematise and explain the world through the natural means led to the emergence of the secular narrative. It classified particular aspects of human life as “the religion” – a “natural”, unreasoned human state distinct from the reasoned, scientific, in other words, “enlightened” state. After developing the dichotomy between science and religion, the latter became a substantive, definable and empirically tangible, concept. It was “made” measurable and describable as the best Enlightenment tradition required. The Enlightenment intellectuals saw this as an entirely adequate categorisation and, therefore, attempted to find the universal application for it. Relying on the fact that “religious” practices are observable throughout the world, it was assumed that “religious self-consciousness” must have a clear conceptual expression in all languages throughout the world. However, it appeared that the western concept of religion (whatever we put in it) is not universal. Scholars of the nineteenth century had a hard time finding an equivalent to this term in Chinese, Indian and many other languages. Facing translational difficulties, the strategy of “consensual meaning” was applied. Scholars of that time attempt to find the approximate word, rendering its meaning as close to the western notion of religion as possible. Therefore, for the equivalent of the word “religion” in Sanskrit language was taken the word “dharma” – original meaning of which is something like “the order of the world and the behaviour adequate to that order”. Lash notes, however, that the meaning relation between “religion” and “dharma” is, nevertheless, poor:
The only word I know whose range of sense – from shape and measures and proportions, cause and order (with all the rich ambivalence that these last two terms carry) to context and reason, necessity and reasons given – covers anything like the same territory that dharma seems to do is the Latin word ratio, as used by Aquinas. And it is interesting to observe that both terms can carry connotations of ‘field’ or ‘ground’ or ‘background’. But I don’t think that ratio has ever meant ‘religion’!\(^{13}\)

Therefore, it was decided that, for example, in Aztec language closest to the “religion” are words “yecnemiliztli” – the right way of life – and tlamanitilizli – a custom. In old Germanic language, the equivalent would be “ewa” – order, and in Gothic “galaubjan” – something that is perceived as good and kind. In Slavonic, it is “wiara”, “vierà” – faith (originating from “vierño” – true) – and in Greek, there are words “eusebeia” – piety – and “therapeia” - worship etc.\(^{14}\). Despite the broad and diverse field of connotations, ranging from “trust” and “faith”, “law”, and “order” to “custom” and “appropriate behaviour”, “piety” and “worship” etc. all these where accepted as appropriate equivalents to what the West understands as “the religion”. While the absence of the western concept in other societies was quite obvious and the relevance of chosen equivalents is (at least) dubious, nevertheless, taxonomic construction of knowledge and encyclopaedic categorisation of things required some consensus.

The consensus was reached, and generations of scholars took it to be a common sense. Emerging social science divided social reality into three fields to be studied by three disciplines – political science, economics and sociology. The political sciences studied “the realm of power and state”, economics studied the market and sociology studied what was left\(^{15}\). “Religion” fell under the latter category, and this is how these distinctions in social science were inherited. It is worth noting, however, that many nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars who laid the foundation for the anthropological study of religion – H. Spencer, E. B. Tylor, J. Frazer, – produced their works very much with (the above-mentioned) “creative spirit”, making rather brave assumptions. It is hard to overlook a “single minded passion for pure prose” in their works. However, later many scholars developed a reasonable critique of the intellectual assumptions of these scholars\(^{16}\), therefore, the approaches to the anthropological study of religion nowadays are diverse. Nevertheless, the concept of religion today is well established within social science and, ironically, it is used even by its most prominent critics. The notion of “religion” today instantly refers to something almost as substantive as, say, mortgage or the National Health Service and that is for better or worse\(^{17}\). It is probably justifiable to recognise certain aspects of human life as “religion”, however, social science should keep awareness of the consensual nature of the notion and must not forget that it is hardly separable from all other aspects of the human life.

### 1.2. The problem of the concept of World Religions

The turn from religion as Christianity to religiosity as innate “a priori”\(^{18}\) and, therefore, to substance “the religion”, almost simultaneously developed a plural form of the notion.
Four “religions” (as mentioned earlier) where known slightly before the Cambridge Platonists. However, Judaism, Christianity, Mahometanism and paganism were considered not as a result of four different world views, but as having one source of knowledge (that of the Divine Revelation) which was expressed (and affected) through different minds and conditions. However, after the emerging encounters with non-western societies, plural perceptions of “religions” were inevitably liberalised. The nineteenth century development of “Religionswissenschaft” – a comparative science of religion, and Orientalism, was an obvious result of this turn. Masuzawa suggests that both western discourses, religion and religions, from the very beginning sprang from the discourses of secularisation and othering. We have briefly discussed how secularisation produced the modern concept of religion. It is worth adding that, during the secularisation process, the “Divine Revelation” as a primary source of religion was rejected, switching to the view that every religion has its own original source. Therefore, religions in (a plural sense) became fully self-sufficient a concept.

Orientalism, meanwhile, contributes to religious plurality and yet (as it is well known) stands for the othering discourse. The nineteenth century pattern of three social science disciplines intended for studying western societies, as Masuzawa tells us, was complemented with two others, which were targeted at studying the world outside the West. These are Anthropology and Orientalism. The first focused on small scale tribal societies and the latter focused on kingdoms or empires with long, illustrious, in other words, “great” written traditions. The defining feature of Orientalism, however, was the preoccupation with religions as historically unique traditions. Therefore with the recognition of the great Oriental heritage came the “great” Oriental religions that complemented the long established classification of other “great” religious traditions - Christianity, Judaism, Mahometanism and paganism. The simplified concept of paganism as non-monotheistic religion became more specific, meanwhile, getting rid of the very notion “pagan”. While the Renaissance stood for changes in the concept of religion, Modernity was a shift in the concept from singular to plural, inducing a new classification of religions. Yet the discourse of othering seems to be as a standing point there. George Foot Moore’s authoritative work on the world religions has quite illustrative statements:

The plan of this work embraces only the religions of civilised peoples. What are miscalled ‘primitive’ religions are the subject for themselves, demanding another method, and much too extensive to be incidentally dispatched in the prolegomena to a History of Religions. Nor is an investigation of them necessary to our purpose; the phenomena which occur in the higher religions as survivals are just as intelligible as in Babylonia or in Greece as in Africa or Australia.

Moore’s introductory chapter is rich with racist discourses, categories like ancient and modern “savages”, primitives and similar epithets of othering. However what is more important for us here is that Moore’s introduction reflects this common sense distinction of that time between “higher” and “primitive” religions. Primitive religions, as “subjects for themselves”, demanding “another method”, created a subject for anthropology of religion. While “higher” religions became a subject of the emerging discipline of the history
of the World Religions. By the 1930s, curriculum of comparative religions and history of the World Religions had been established in colleges and some of the leading Universities of North America. In the process of the establishment of the concept of World Religions a new taxonomy has emerged. It encompassed Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, and, of course, Primitivism. This taxonomy has remained approximately the same until the present.

Inherent problems of this taxonomy are hidden not only in the concepts discussed, but also in the very strategy of representation of the particular World Religion. The concept is constructed of the most prominent “defining features” of Islam, Hinduism or Judaism. These assumptions are a set of “criteria and features that do not bear a necessary relation to each other, and which therefore extend independently and non-coextensively in all directions”. It all started as selective abstractions with the prejudices about “other” people and it could be argued that this legacy is still there. The concept of the World Religion may work well for the school book, presenting the world’s diversity to broaden pupils’ horizons, but it is of little use for an anthropologist. These problems are very well addressed by a number of contemporary anthropologists. It often appears that what was assumed to be a World Religion is merely a Western intellectual construction which began with condensing the liquid phenomena of spiritual appeal and practices to something what was called “the religion” which later evolved to concept signifying religion on a large scale, namely World Religion. Some would even say that this “take” on a “World Religion” is no more than an outsider’s perspective and, as far as it is true, the concept is of dubious use for an anthropologist.

The question discussed in this article, however, makes an emphasis on the “local expressions” of the World Religion. Nevertheless, this emphasis changes but does not entirely solve the problem for an anthropologist. We will come back to this when discussing the problem of “departure” from “central ideals and doctrines”. For now, we can see that the concept of World Religions is no less problematic than the concept of religion itself.

2. Limitations of Marxist dialectics in Anthropology of Religion

2.1. “Local expressions of a world religion” or simply the Marxist dialectics?

Before going into the question of “departure from”, we have to clarify problematic formulation – “local expressions of world religion”. This expression intrinsically implies previously discussed problems. Here we come to the problem of dialectical lens in the study of religion. That is the assumption that there is “somewhere” stored the central, substantive, trans-local “world religion” with its authority and multiple local expressions. This also implies that the local expressions tend to represent somewhat reinterpreted version of central, dominant religious orthodoxy. This is almost the classical Marxist dialectical model of dominant institutional structure and dominated subordinates or “ordinary people”. Empirical evidence, however, questions this kind of simplistic theoretical approach.
I will refer to Christianity as a key example, however, the problem with these assumptions can be also illustrated with the case of the “invention” of Buddhism. Until the nineteenth century, assumptions about “solid” Buddhism have not existed. It is French philologist Eugene Burnouf who, after thorough studies of obtained Sanskrit manuscripts, in 1844 published the “Introduction à l’Histoire de Buddhisme”\textsuperscript{28}. This laid foundation for the western perception of Buddhism as a single entity. Many other contemporary scholars have raised the question: what, if anything, different forms of Buddhism have in common. Assad, writing on anthropology of Islam, notices the resembling tendency\textsuperscript{29}.

From an anthropological perspective, Christianity is not an exception. Its diversity can be grasped even in such generalizing study as Max Weber’s “Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism”. However, looking at the history, the diversity of Christian communities is overwhelming. The first known church council (recorded in the New Testament – Acts 15) was exactly about how to cope with the diversity challenge in early Christian communities. Jerusalem’s “fraction” encountered the fact of Paul’s pagan converts and had to decide how to manage the de-nationalised idea of Christianity. Consensus was reached by deciding that Jewish Christians can continue practicing Judaism (if they wish), while, for pagan Christians, it is enough to abstain from the meat sacrificed to idols, blood of meat of strangled animals and “unlawful marriage”\textsuperscript{30}. Likewise, most of the following church councils where dedicated almost exceptionally to the diversity issues. Early Christianity, spreading in Asia Minor, from the very beginning was immensely divergent. It balanced on Paul’s developed theological universalism, also on local nationalism and syncretism. Liturgical differences were off interest to anyone until two basic elements – the breaking of the bread and the reading of “sacred texts” – where preserved. Coptic and Greek Christian liturgies seem to be unique from the very beginning. Alongside the theological concept of “the Church” as the universal “body of Christ”\textsuperscript{31} there was always notion of “churches” as the local bodies of Christianity. According to Johnson, the concept of “Christendom” becomes inclusive only with the explosion of Islam in Mediterranean basin\textsuperscript{32}. Even then this concept included divergent Christian societies such as Armenian and Nubian Monophysites who considered themselves as different churches on theological basis. The concept of Christianity as solid-melted entity post-dates European expansion era. Thus, reinterpreting R. C. Collingwood, we can say that such an academic interpretation of this religion is “intimately associated with an internal Christian perspective”\textsuperscript{33}.

Ethnographic accounts of Christianity’s versions throughout the world imply that Christianity is as “local” as Buddhism and Islam are. In this sense every Christianity is vernacular Christianity. The Catholic Church preserves its unity on basis of negotiation between rather different traditions and rites. Protestantism is extremely diverse having in mind countless variety of their communities, and their only unifying aspect are their nineteenth century “fundamentals” of Christian beliefs. However, not all protestant communities comply with these. Meanwhile, some of the indispensable aspects of Catholic Christianity are not among these. Variety and uniqueness of Eastern Orthodox churches is yet another example. Taking into account Christianities of non-western societies, the solidity of the “Christendom” concept is even more challenged. What do
such Christianities as, say, Crossfire variation of Native American Church, Yaqui post-Catholic Christianity\textsuperscript{35} and Masowe Apostolic church in Africa have in common?\textsuperscript{26} What are these ideals of “trans-local” Christianity from which they have, possibly, departed?

### 2.2. What is religion’s “departure” from “central ideals and doctrines”?

With these considerations we come to the last problematic formulation in the question “why do the local expressions of a world religion so often appear to depart from its central ideals and doctrines?” This also brings us back to the question how do we define religion. If we mean by “religion” a set of beliefs, morals and practices outside the daily routine, then which of these elements are central, and how do we perceive “departure” from them? Most religions would not agree with the statement that their central ideals rest on morals. Moreover, the very notion of “morals” creates obscurities of its own. According to Aberlee, Navaho traditionalists and Christians have quite different understanding about the importance of moral actions to religious life. According to the traditionalists, religion is much more concerned with different taboos than with morality. Contrariwise, morality is integral part of Christian Navahos religious life. Still morality is considered as a natural outcome of a devoted religious life rather than its core\textsuperscript{37}. This example reveals that notion of “moral decline” is a complex one. It must also be noted that the word “departure” presupposes the idea of lineal development which leans on entirely western perspective. It derives from western theory of history with its emphasis on “decline”, as well as evolutionist attitude, influence of which can be recognized in many academic fields, including social sciences\textsuperscript{38}. The only possible “lineal development” one can find is in analysing Protestantism. However, the precise term for this development would rather be “mutation”, in a sense that on a basis of former develops something other. Therefore, it seems that process of development of Christianity including its cognitive, experiential and institutional aspects is not a “departure from” but a “reinvention of”. It was not a “departure” from “ideals” of Jewish Christianity but its reinvention by inventing the “pagan Christianity”. The Crossfire variation of Native American Church is not a “departure” from the “ideal” Protestant, Catholic or Mormon Christianities but their reinvention by inventing unique vernacular Native Christianity. Likewise, Yaqui tribe’s Christianity has been as unique as one can imagine since its very beginning.

The question about “central ideals and doctrines” brings forward the Asadian analysis of religion according to which the orthodoxy is a creation of institutional authorities which define “the ideals and doctrines” as well as what is “central” in them. However, W. James and D. H. Jones insightfully argue: “Christianity does not necessarily spread as organic entity; partial elements, themes, symbols, practices, are characteristically taken up by particular culture or civilisation, ethnic, class or interest group at a particular time.”\textsuperscript{39} The case of 1930’s Nigerian Christian revival shows, that a non confessional charismatic preacher can boost the reinvention of the local Christianity using such “non central” elements like the holy stream\textsuperscript{40}. Contemporary “Vineyard Churches” appeal to individuals through, indeed, remarkable music and sound. There the individual experience plays the leading role and determines which elements of Christianity are to be selected as central.
From anthropological point of view it is not an easy task to define the “central ideals and doctrines of religion” because in the process of reinvention particular elements that used to be considered “central” in one religious setting may become peripheral or disappear at all in another. This is even more so if we consider shift from one religious tradition to the other. Touching and holding deadly vipers during the religious services of “Snake-Handling” (a Christian cult among American “Bible Belt” communities) is believed to be the “central” element of the service, as it proofs the God’s presence to participants. Other churches of American “Bible Belt” focus on healing or prophesy, while Catholicism puts strong emphasis on sacramental presence of Christ under the species of bread and vine. All these communities hold the presence of God absolutely “central” element of their services yet all of them have very different understanding about the ways this presence makes itself obvious to congregation.

The question about religion’s “departure” from “central ideals and doctrines” may also imply the general predisposition that within the dynamics of any religion there is coded potential intrinsic degradation of its values. However, it is hard to comply with this statement. Ethnographic evidence of religions show far more complex dynamics than that. It is either waves of “ups” and “downs” like V. Turner explains this in his “Ritual Process” or a mutation-like process which leads to separation and reinvention (e. g. in religious crisis). However, it is arguable that departure from values and doctrines is a central issue even in the dynamics of crisis and separation. If there is a charismatic leader involved, then “routinisation of his charisma” is not exactly a departure from values and doctrines. If the tendency of the decline would be intrinsic, then divergent versions of, say, Catholicism or Eastern Christianity would not have survived for nearly 2000 years. Most of members of any Christian community would not agree that their religion is in “departed” state. Considering what was just said it is impossible to generalise neither about an intrinsic tendency of religion to “degrade” nor about its “central ideals and doctrines” as the departure point of the degrading process. Yet if we still do hold these predispositions, we either exercise a value judgement or articulate a stereotyped images of Christianity, or do both at once.

**Conclusions**

This article was started by challenging the concept of religion, showing its historical development to the contemporary understanding. We agree that it is justifiable to talk of it as something substantive; however, it is necessary to keep in mind that non-western societies do not necessarily have the exact analogy of the concept. Therefore, most of the assumptions that we make about it are a product of a western thought. The same can be said about the concept of the world religion, which is off any particular use for the anthropologist. Ignoring these theoretical problems may result in an unintended implications and even errors in scholarly analysis. The question discussed in the introduction of this article has the dialectical nature, therefore, such question must not be taken for granted but should be seen within the context of its theoretical background. A leap over the problems which are embedded within the question leads to a theoretical trap which
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predetermines what kind of assumptions scholar might come up to, and makes anthropological analysis predictable.

T. Asad’s approach stressing on the historical conditions in the development of (the notion of) religion becomes indispensable when analysing the concept of the world religions. Contemporary ethnographers find it difficult to operate the notion whose origins have little to do with the notion found in the field. From the anthropological perspective, it is not valid to speak of Christianity (likewise most of the other religions) as a world religion and refer to some “central” ideas and doctrines (not only because it would be a stretch to the dialectical framework). If to be empirically accurate, it would be challenging to find commonalities in vernacular versions of Christianity even among the western societies, while non-western versions of it are hardly comparable at all. Therefore, such generalisations as “central ideals and doctrines” of world religion are hardly acceptable as empirically based anthropological categories.

The idea of lineal development of religion is questionable as well. If we accept the idea of vernacularity of religion then a lineal “departure from” its “central ideals and doctrines” is, not a valid understanding, and is replaceable by the notion of “reinvention”. Then, what is left of the essay’s introductory question, is a prosaic premise that religion somehow “naturally” tend to degrade from its “original” values. That is the statement which not exactly suits anthropological discussion.

REFERENCES

4 Ibid. P. 60.
7 The most ordinary example would be writings of J. J. Rousseau.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid. P. 22.
As for the worse, it is hardly debatable that Marxist perception of religion, taking it as something extremely substantive and tangible, led to a great deal of persecutions on religious basis, attempting to erase it from a “new social projects”.

Religiosity as an innate a priory laid the foundation to later notion of natural religion.

18 Religiosity as an innate a priory laid the foundation to later notion of natural religion.


21 Ibid. P. 15.

22 Ibid. P. 38.


24 However, the earliest attempts to introduce professorial chair for the discipline of comparative religions in US universities dates back to 1873 while in Europe it was even earlier – 1834 (see *Masuzawa*. Op. cit. P. 45. Footnote 20).


30 This is inaccurate English translation. Originally there was used Jewish notion of promisquity-like sexual behavior that was associated with pagans.

31 See 1 Cor 12, Eph 2.


34 Yaqui is Native American tribe residing in the Pima County of the state Arizona.


40 Ibid. P. 109–110.


42 See also *Engelke*. A Problem of Presence – Beyond Scripture in an African Church. P. 1–45.


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ir racionalumui. Religija imama vertinti dichotomijos „mokslas vs religija“ kontekste, t. y. kaip nemokšlė, natūrali, racionalaus proto nepaveikta žmogų širdis ir atitinkamų socialinių praktikų išraiška. Analizuojama, kaip šiame kontekste susiformavo šiuolaikinė mokslinė „pamatuojamos“ religijos apibrėžtis ir su kokiomis problemomis buvo (ir tebėra) susiduriama nuo pat tokios apibrėžties pradžios. Straipsnyje pateikiami pavyzdžiai, kaip buvo išskirta ir nerandama religijos koncepto atitikmenų kitose kalbose ir kaip ši problema išspręsta pasirenkant sąlyginius lingvistinius atitikmenis. Taip pat autoriai apžvelgia termino „pasaulio religija“ raidą, aiškina šio termino sąlyginumą ir kelia termino mokslostrūkis klausimą.

Antroje straipsnio dalyje imamasi analizuoti plačiai paplitusių idejų ir formuluotų religijos atžvilgiu rinkinių, atspindinčių konkrečią Kembridžo universiteto Antropologijos fakulteto suformuluotą klausimeteiginį, kuris iš anksto kyla kaip minėtos religijos apibrėžtis ir markštinės kaleidoskopijos dialėtikos teismo religijos studijose. Autoriai teigia, jog netarsiai ir nekritiškai taikant markštinės dialektikos religijos tyriminės kyla pavojus, kad religijos studijos kels tik tam tikrus pačių markštinėse dialektikos aktualūs ir tik jai būdingus klausimus, pateiks tik šiai teorinei prieičiai tinkamus atsakymus.