



ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION: THEORIES, METHODS AND FIELD EXPERIENCES

Jeanne Kormina

National Research University Higher School of Economics
16 Soyuzna Pechatnikov Str., St Petersburg, Russia
jkormina@hse.ru; kormina@eu.spb.ru

Alexander Panchenko

European University at St Petersburg
3 Gagarinskaya Str., St Petersburg, Russia
Institute of Russian Literature (The Pushkin House), Russian Academy of Sciences
4 Makarova Emb., St Petersburg, Russia
apanchenko2008@gmail.com

Sergei Shtyrkov

European University at St Petersburg
3 Gagarinskaya Str., St Petersburg, Russia
Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy
of Sciences
3 Universitetskaya Emb., St Petersburg, Russia
shtyr@eu.spb.ru

Abstract: This article is devoted to a survey and analysis of a discussion of current problems of the anthropology of religion. The answers to the question of the theoretical justification and analytical significance of the concept of 'religion' in contemporary anthropology show that for many specialists (but not all) this problem has significance both in the context of epistemological reflection, and with regard to empirical topics, field methods and research strategies. Though the approaches to the use of the concept of 'religion' are very diverse, it is evident that in contemporary anthropology its meaning is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand our discussion shows that there is no universal and generally accepted understanding of the term, and that its use inevitably leads to relativist reflection. On the other hand, many specialists (and for many reasons) are unprepared entirely to renounce religion as a significant academic concept. Among the means of 'restoring' the status of a fully-fledged object of anthropological research to religion, the most prominent seems to us to be the 'ontological approach' based on a critical re-evaluation of the 'classical' theories and discursive norms of the social sciences.

Another aspect of the work of social researchers in the field of religion, especially those who engage in fieldwork and are in direct contact with members of the communities under study, concerns the identity of researchers themselves. They are confronted with the need simultaneously to shorten and lengthen the distance between themselves and the people whose life they are studying. They are forced to maintain a difficult balance between loyalty to two different systems of conventions: their own corporation and the religious group among whom they are conducting research. And finally, they must calculate the possible consequences of their research results entering the space of public discussion about the place of religion in general or of particular religious groups and practices in modern post-secular society.

Keywords: anthropology of religion, epistemology of social sciences, fieldwork methodology.

To cite: Kormina J., Panchenko A., Shtyrkov S., 'Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion: Theories, Methods and Field Experiences', *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, 2017, no. 13, pp. 138–160.

URL: http://anthropologie.kunstkamera.ru/files/pdf/eng013/kormina_panchenko_shtyrkov.pdf

Jeanne Kormina, Alexander Panchenko, Sergei Shtyrkov

Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion: Theories, Methods and Field Experiences

This article is devoted to a survey and analysis of a discussion of current problems of the anthropology of religion. The answers to the question of the theoretical justification and analytical significance of the concept of 'religion' in contemporary anthropology show that for many specialists (but not all) this problem has significance both in the context of epistemological reflection, and with regard to empirical topics, field methods and research strategies. Though the approaches to the use of the concept of 'religion' are very diverse, it is evident that in contemporary anthropology its meaning is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand our discussion shows that there is no universal and generally accepted understanding of the term, and that its use inevitably leads to relativist reflection. On the other hand, many specialists (and for many reasons) are unprepared entirely to renounce religion as a significant academic concept. Among the means of 'restoring' the status of a fully-fledged object of anthropological research to religion, the most prominent seems to us to be the 'ontological approach' based on a critical re-evaluation of the 'classical' theories and discursive norms of the social sciences.

Another aspect of the work of social researchers in the field of religion, especially those who engage in fieldwork and are in direct contact with members of the communities under study, concerns the identity of researchers themselves. They are confronted with the need simultaneously to shorten and lengthen the distance between themselves and the people whose life they are studying. They are forced to maintain a difficult balance between loyalty to two different systems of conventions: their own corporation and the religious group among whom they are conducting research. And finally, they must calculate the possible consequences of their research results entering the space of public discussion about the place of religion in general or of particular religious groups and practices in modern post-secular society.

Keywords: anthropology of religion, epistemology of social sciences, fieldwork methodology.

Jeanne Kormina

National Research University
Higher School of Economics
16 Soyuzza Pechatnikov Str.,
St Petersburg, Russia
jkormina@hse.ru;
kormina@eu.spb.ru

Alexander Panchenko

European University
at St Petersburg
3 Gagarinskaya Str.,
St Petersburg, Russia
Institute of Russian Literature
(The Pushkin House),
Russian Academy of Sciences
4 Makarova Emb.,
St Petersburg, Russia
apanchenko2008@gmail.com

Sergei Shtyrkov

European University
at St Petersburg
3 Gagarinskaya Str.,
St Petersburg, Russia
Peter the Great Museum
of Anthropology and Ethnography
(Kunstkamera),
Russian Academy of Sciences
3 Universitetskaya Emb.,
St Petersburg, Russia
shtyr@eu.spb.ru

In contemporary social science, religion is a key topic of investigation, and the problems relating to its analysis have attracted much reflection. These problems are usually divided into two sets: the conceptual and the technical. However, when it is a question of the study of religious life through ethnographic methods, it turns out that these two levels of discussion define each other. Indeed, the viewpoint which determines our vision of any religious phenomenon, and even our ability to recognise it in the flow of social life is directly dependent on how we understand the figure of the observer. In other words, when we speak of what religion is, we at the same time define our own corporate and confessional identity, and, consequently, our rights, duties and capacities as creators of those categories of the societal imagination that define the field of religion. In this sense anthropologists and sociologists 'invent religion', just like other participants in the seamless process of the societal construction of reality. In proposing a discussion on a series of questions that we ourselves have encountered, we asked our

colleagues to share their experience of reflecting on this topic in order to understand the directions in which theoretical and empirical work might evolve in the study of those phenomena which until quite recently we assigned to the sphere of religion boldly and confidently, and now timidly and with many qualifications.

The answers to the question on the theoretical justification and analytical significance of the concept of religion in contemporary anthropology show that for many (though not all) specialists this problem is significant both in the context of epistemological reflection and with reference to empirical topics, field methods and research strategies. As a number of participants in the discussion rightly remark, the theoretical debates of recent decades about the term 'religion' must be examined in the wider context of the 'critical turn' in the social sciences and humanities of the end of the twentieth century. Thus Simon Coleman remarks, 'We also need to be careful not to grant religion a particular form of exceptionalism: while scholarship on "religion" reflects that fact that it is a product of the academy and associated institutional forces, so too does work on "economics", "politics", and so on.' This position is shared by Robert Orsi: 'Across the social sciences and humanities, late-twentieth century critiques of "culture", "history", "science", "literature" and "law", which were in every case necessary at the start, led to the conclusion that not only were these terms useless for theory; the lived realities they were once thought to name did not exist either. It was finally religion's turn to fall into this black hole.'

However, to acknowledge that not only 'religion', but other concepts significant for academic discourse have 'fallen into' the black hole of critical analysis and deconstruction is not to do away with the question of how this concept may be used by the contemporary anthropologist. Some participants in the discussion express serious doubts about its theoretical and empirical significance. Daria Dubovka suggests that 'the difference between religious and secular groups, or between different types of religious group' should be seen 'in the different power dispositions of these groups'. 'Thus,' she continues, 'religion does not exist as an analytical category for me. All communities have to do with imagined actors, and either we look at how these communities include the imagined in their reality and what power they endue them with, or what these imagined actors, the capacity to invent them or the need for them, give to humanity as a species.'

'In my studies on Evangelical Protestantism', Igor Mikeshin writes, 'I have come to the conclusion that not only does the term "religion" create more problems in the conceptual apparatus than it solves, but that its place is gradually being taken by the narrower concept of "Christianity". This concept is so diverse, and the communities

brought together under this name so different in their ideology, theology, ecclesiology and hermeneutics that it sometimes becomes an impossible task to identify the distinguishing characteristics of Christianity as a social phenomenon. Against this background some sort of working definition of religion for social research looks completely utopian. <...> For me, as an anthropologist of Evangelical Christianity, the term “religion” does not usually offer any research interest, and serves only as a marker of an extended disciplinary community with its thematic conferences, publications, grants and vacant posts.’

Anastasia Mitrofanova draws attention to the character of the distinction between the ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ in academic research, which is conventional and frequently not subject to reflection, and reminds us of the problem of ‘political’ and ‘civil’ religions: ‘I have my doubts about the designation of any group or practice as religious or non-religious. There are many unspoken conventions about what or whom we researchers consider as religious. We are inclined to accept the older conventions uncritically: we all know (somehow) that the Zoroastrians are a religious group and the Stoics are not, or that St Symeon, living on his column, was engaging in a religious practice, while Diogenes, living (perhaps) in his barrel, was not. <...> Nationalism and everything connected with it is in the same grey area as the “political religions”. We somehow know that nationalism is an ideology, not a religion, even though it does not look much like a classical ideology (for example, it does not express any class interests), and it does have quite a strong flavour of what we unanimously define as religion. The nationalist cult is indistinguishable from the religious cult: in both we see certain obviously “sacred” objects (if only we knew what that meant!), all kinds of holy places, hagiographies and complex ritual practices. Hence arose the concept of civil religions, another category of non- or not quite religions. It looks like a joke, but for researchers the worship of a macaronic monster is a religion, but worship at the graves of fallen national heroes is not a religion. Only these jokes have very serious legal consequences, in the form of actions against offences to religious feelings, incitement to religious hatred, etc.’

In Andrei Tiukhtiaev’s opinion, religion as an analytical category needs to be ‘put together again’ in some way: ‘given that the terms “religion” and “New Age” have many weaknesses, perhaps they should be dissected into taxonomic units and a basis for conceptualising the social practices being studied sought among these latter.’

The somewhat different approach suggested by many participants in the discussion implies an analysis of the genealogy and variation in the content of the concept of ‘religion’ in anthropology. Simon

Coleman suggests that we might speak of three ways of constructing religion as an analytical object. The first of these, the 'historically contingent', relies both on the work of Talal Asad and the tradition of sociological constructivism and views religion as 'a category that may be shaped and operationalised by numerous interest groups, including religious practitioners, scholars, politicians, cultural entrepreneurs, and indeed people who combine these roles.' In the context of this approach — as some other participants in the discussion also write — special attention is paid to the 'Christian genealogy' of anthropological research in general and anthropology of religion in particular: one of the main critical objections to the traditional understanding of religion in anthropology is, as we know, that it relies on Protestant (or post-Reformation) categories and norms.

Vlad Naumescu too writes of the complexities and continuity of the genealogical relationship between anthropology and Christianity, suggesting that 'the renewed anthropological interest in religion and especially Christianity [has] led to a reconsideration of our epistemological and methodological positions in recent years. This interest has been driven by a fascination for the "exotic other" — famously coined as "the repugnant cultural Other" in an essay by anthropologist Susan Harding — the fundamentalist, conservative Christians who seem to represent the very opposite of what anthropologists imagine themselves to be [Harding 1991]. Much of this effort to rethink our position towards Christianity required a systematic exploration of Christian cultures and a more serious engagement with theology and practice. The theoretical model generated this way drew heavily on studies of Evangelical Christianity, particularly Pentecostalism, one the fastest growing religious movements in the world. The Protestant bias of the anthropology of Christianity attracted a fair amount of criticism but what made this new field different was the shift (or return) to a culturalist approach to religion.' At the same time, in his own work Naumescu follows those anthropologists who believe that the language of ethics and morality should be the central object of the study of post-colonial societies. In his opinion, 'Morality also seemed to reflect better not only individual transformation but everyday realities on the ground: the times in which old social contracts were discredited and new ones were not yet in place, when the language of change was itself moralising and the new politics were articulated in an ethics of reform. In this respect, the turn to ethics also offered the possibility to explore the shifting borders of religious and secular domains and thus go beyond problematic dichotomies inherent in this field.' However, this position may in turn also become the object of both constructivist and genealogical critiques. On the one hand, the combination of the anthropology of religion and the anthropology of morality may

be traced to the Protestant categorial apparatus of modern social sciences. Besides, the observation of the moral and ethical expectations that are connected with religion in post-colonial societies (and indeed elsewhere) at the turn of the millennium tells us nothing in itself of the meaning and operability of religion as an analytical category in contemporary anthropology.

Robert Orsi goes even further in his genealogical critique when he suggests that the classical social theories of religion are inextricably linked with the discursive regime of the modern age, which is founded on distinctions, hierarchies and conceptional binarism: 'Political and historical genealogies of "religion" have shown among other things how deeply implicated the modern study of religion was in the construction and maintenance of certain boundaries, between present / past, for instance, here / there, oneself / another, body / mind, living / dead, and public / private. "Religion" secures the slash. These binaries are fundamentally constitutive of modern consciousness and subjectivity, of modern ways of being-in-the-world. <...> In this way, theories of religion created the historical unconscious of the discipline and contributed to the making of the unconscious of modernity itself, into which disallowed, terrifying, disruptive, and "irrational" religious practices were stored. <...> Here is the conundrum, then: how are scholars of religion to generate alternative and productive theories of religion that will open up new horizons of research when the academic discipline of religious studies of which they (we) are licensed practitioners was so central in establishing and maintaining modernity's hierarchies and limits?'

One way of avoiding this paradox, evidently, may be Michael Lambek's conception, which develops the ideas of Clifford Geertz and Roy Rappaport and views religion as one of the 'discursive regimes of the production of truth'. 'I think,' writes Lambek, 'that for Geertz "religion" points not to culture in general but to a particular aspect, property, feature, or function of culture, namely the way it anchors itself and asserts what is most fundamental to a given world, how it produces credence, plausibility, direction, and meaning to a given way of life; what, as Geertz says, links the model of how the world is with a model or models for how to act in it, as well as those ideas and practices which acknowledge paradox, scepticism, irony, and contingency. <...> If this is a productive use of the term "religion", it invites close inspection on how truth is constituted (found, revealed, established, acknowledged...) and consideration of how to distinguish the nature and kinds of truth productions and certainties established by, say, Islam or Christianity from those established by science or by law. How, in the modern world are these different and incommensurable modes or regimes of truth and the competing or complementary invitations or demands to accept them articulated in social life?' Lambek's conception is shared

by Agnieszka Halemba, who nevertheless notes that such an approach does not of itself guarantee the preservation of religion as an analytical category: 'Most researchers accept that religion is a historical category. Still, this does not stop us from applying this term to other times and places or at least from understanding when other people talk about religion in ancient Egypt or China. One solution to this would be to say, and I admit it is very tempting solution, that we should skip the term altogether and talk about different regimes of truth making. It is easy to see that within one historical tradition, such as Christianity we have very different regimes of truth-making — a point which Chris Hann repeatedly tries to bring across to the growing field of anthropology of Christianity with reference to eastern Christianity [Hann 2007; Hann, Goltz (eds.) 2010].'

'Still, I admit that this solution is not to my full satisfaction. However different are the religious regimes of truth-making, there seems to be a level of Wittgenstein's family resemblances between them. Those regimes might be very diverse, but in most general terms, they seem all to refer to some kind of realities that are deemed to exist in various ways and to varied extent, apart from everyday immediate experience.'

The second approach mentioned by Coleman has enjoyed a certain popularity over the last decade, but at the same time has attracted quite a lot of criticism. These are the methods enunciated by 'cognitively-inspired theorists [who] propose that religious dispositions or latent capacities are hard-wired into our mental apparatus as a consequence or side-effect of human evolution.' 'It seems unfortunate,' Coleman remarks, 'that, with some exceptions (e.g. [Whitehouse, Laidlaw (eds.) 2007]), the cognitivist and the contingent camps have had relatively little to say to each other. Part of the reason for this lack of communication may be that very different temporal and spatial scales are at play. The *longue durée* of evolution is revealed through a different observational apparatus than that necessary to provide fine-grained descriptions of specific ethnographic events. But the cleavage also — like the recent emergence of the anthropology of Christianity — exposes one of the repressed paradoxes on which anthropology has tended to rest: the celebration of radical *difference* at the level of culture, alongside the assertion of radical *similarity* at the level of human physiology.'

It should be said, moreover, that an even more critical reaction to the theoretical premisses and claims of modern cognitive religious studies was expressed in the course of the discussion. Agnieszka Halemba suggests that the cognitive psychologists' and anthropologists' declared programme of 'explaining religion' does not in fact involve any identification and analysis of specifically religious phenomena: 'This is just a marketing strategy. What they do is to focus their research effort on a number of cognitive mechanisms

that underline certain kinds of religious thinking and practice (especially cooperation and ritual) but that underline also many other forms of human thought and behavior. There is nothing intrinsically “religious” about the mechanisms they focus on. Cognitive approaches at the most only touch a social level, on which religion appears in the first place.’

Finally, the third approach mentioned by Coleman is a sort of ‘return to theology’. ‘One of the more heated current conversations in the anthropology of religion, that between anthropology and theology, is interesting because it re-examines and to some degree re-ignites the original ideological skirmishes out of which anthropology emerged.’ This must presumably be about the wider ideological and gnoseological context, an interest not in theology as such, but in the ontology that underpins it, both in Christian (or Abrahamic) cultures and others. This, in particular, is what Laur Vallikivi writes about when he suggests that ‘the anthropology of ontology and the anthropology of Christianity have been among the most exciting recent developments in anthropology — of religion and beyond — offering new theoretical challenges and heuristic tools for ethnographers. Although their theoretical starting points have been rather different, their aims in many ways are largely overlapping as they both try to take seriously the other by using indigenous categories. Both projects have set as their aim at getting closer to the actual experience of the people they study.’ Still, in Vallikivi’s opinion, this approach is also fraught with methodological difficulties, insofar as we are faced with the question of the integrity, logical coherence and interactions of the ontological models that we study: ‘My question is how we can understand such situations when people live with multiple ontologies (metaphysics, religions etc.). Can the same person inhabit different worlds — in our case animist and Christian — at the same time? My field material shows that it is not even necessarily a matter of shifting between ontologies after all but rather the shifts occur in the patterns of relationalities in which ontologies overlap.’

Robert Orsi too examines a distinctive ontological model when he proposes interpreting religion as a sort of ‘matrix of presence’: ‘I think the idea of real presence would be a good place to begin reconstructing the concept of “religion” in a way that is not derivative of a modern world that has long ago lost its prestige and privilege. This does not mean resorting to a “prescientific” concept, if by this is meant unempirical. Rather, I am proposing a radically empirical approach to religion. When an actor in a particular social world says, “god / the goddess / the ancestors / the dead... commanded me to do x,” with x including loving the neighbour, killing the neighbour, fasting, dying for the gods, consuming the natural world, guarding the natural world, and so on, instead of translating this into a social and political event, we will remain in conversation with

the practitioner in his / her world, not in ours. <...> To approach religion through what I have called a “matrix of presence” restores the dynamism, and the danger, of religions to human experience.’ Generally speaking, certain answers show that the category of religious experience (understood, however, much more broadly than in the ideas of Rudolf Otto, William James or Mircea Eliade) still remains important, and sometimes definitive, for researchers. Thus Catherine Wanner speaks of the experience of transcendence which combines the contemplative with the corporeal and which may be juxtaposed with different forms of human activity and material objects: ‘My research indicates that the essence of religion, faith and spirituality, however understood in a particular context, centres on practices of mediation in which experiences bridge the immanent to transcendent, and connect daily rhythms of worldly life to extraordinary sensations of otherworldly presence. Thanks to these experiences and the sensations they generate, the individual feels the presence of the divine or the “beyond”. Religion, in the sense of a body of knowledge or a social institution, offers techniques to enhance this process of mediation. <...> Whereas religion offers a framework for “making the invisible visible” by authorising and authenticating certain practices to make the transcendent present to the senses in the circumstances of everyday life and in public space, individuals magnify and expand the possibilities for such transcendent experiences through the use of certain practices and objects, such as relics, icons and even choirs, to render present the “beyond”. All of this makes religion imminently performative.’

Many participants in the discussion note that the academic debates on religion must take account of the meaning and sense of this category, and of its synonyms and antonyms, in various public and local discourses. ‘After the scholars have released the concept,’ writes Art Leete, ‘one cannot take it back any more. We must admit that it is not reserved exclusively for our theoretical discussions. “Religion” is very much part of actual political and social practice. If we aim to follow real social discourses, it becomes impossible to throw the concept away. We can use the term in the way as it is positioned in actual social practices and ideological debates as much as it concerns our ethnographic fields.’

These considerations force us to take a new look at the problem of the correlation of the categorisation of religion with the processes and forms of institutionalisation. Agnieszka Halemba proposes that the concept of a social institution should not be ontologised, but retained as an analytical instrument: ““Religiousness” is an attribution that appears on the next level of analysis, which looks at how the “special things” are recognised socially and, what is more important, how “special paths” — that is, “sets of practices that individuals or groups view as effective in attaining goals associated with

special things” — are built [Taves 2009: 47]. This process can be called the institutionalisation of religion, if we understand social institutions as relatively stable social mechanisms patterning human behavior — and at the level we can begin talking about religion for the first time. Social institutions are, however, most often explicitly demarcated from the flow of everyday life and from each other, not by the people who structure their lives according to their patterning mechanisms, but by external observers — foremost among them social scientists trying to describe recurrences in human behavior. This is the basis of the critique of concepts referring to particular social institutions that appear in social anthropology and related disciplines — calling some pattern “kinship” or “religion” is, according to such critiques, a way of effectively creating a social institution by abstracting some aspect of behavior from the flow of everyday life (see, e.g.: [Atkinson 1992; Schneider 1972]). Although such critiques are useful in warning against the possibility of compartmentalising social life and separating aspects that are in practice intertwined, if we remember that “institution” is an analytical concept and not an attempt to define social facts ontologically, then we can productively retain it for analytical purposes. In the case of studies of religion, the institutionalisation of religion and the development of religious institutions would refer to socially recognised ways of dealing with special things and making truth-claims, or, to use Taves’s terminology, of building “special paths”.’

Sonja Luehrmann looks at the problem in a similar manner: she follows the sociologist Martin Riesebrodt’s ideas, pointing to ‘situations of encounter between practitioners of different traditions to argue that a category of religion emerges not only from nineteenth-century armchair scholarship, but from a more organic source: the mutual recognition of ritual experts who see similarities between their own ways of engaging with the sacred and things that strangers or newcomers do <...> This recognition enabled mutual borrowings but also arguments about who was getting it right or wrong. In this interpretation, religion (along with its cognates in other languages) is an inherently comparative category that emerges out of encounters between strangers. <...> By slotting me as a Lutheran, a mother, a professor, and a foreigner, the religious actors I meet during research are practicing the recognition and mutual referencing described by Riesebrodt.’

Detelina Tocheva also writes about the correlation of the category of religion, social institutions and identity, relying on her fieldwork in two different post-colonial contexts and demonstrating the dependency of the conceptualisation of religion on concrete socio-political conditions: ‘In spite of the fact that in both cases I was interested in religion and especially religious ritual in the second case, “religion” was a central category in the politics of inclusion of

my interlocutors in Russia and, conversely, it was not for my informants in Bulgaria. Yet, in this second case, I find it misleading to consider that “religion” is a scholarly category forcefully imposed from the outside. Rather, for my interlocutors, “religion” is not a central self-definitional lens. The difference in the centrality and vibrancy of “religion” for these two groups is revelatory of specific ongoing transformations of religion, society and politics, as well as of the challenges with which the people are faced.’

Ülo Valk writes that anthropologists should not eschew public debates about the content and social meaning of the concept: “‘Pre-scientific’ or “‘theoretically unjustified’” categories are typically those that are widely used in the vernacular, and their meanings can hardly be controlled by scholars only. And there is one more reason why they can be considered “‘problematic’”, specifically they often draw attention to the limits of scientific reasoning and to the fragility of rational world view. <...> However, the categories and phenomena would not go away but would be totally monopolised by esoteric approaches and vernacular theorising and this would not help scholarship. Academic language and scholarly thinking does not need purification or isolation from the vernacular but close contact with other discourses and modes of thought. We gain nothing if we use deconstruction as a method to limit or censor our vocabulary but we can lose something from sight and overlook some serious empirical and theoretical challenges.’ Simon Coleman takes a similar position: ‘Social scientists have often allowed natural scientists to hijack definitions of religion in ways that are deeply problematic. Here I refer to the kind of “science versus religion” discourse that we have seen promulgated by so-called new atheists such as Richard Dawkins in his attacks on creationism. <...> We should not allow such a simple view of either religion or science to permeate the public sphere: the social as well as the natural sciences should be involved in trying to explain why and how certain people appear to believe as they do.’

Many participants in the discussion see in current anthropological discussions a problem that is terminological rather than theoretical. At the same time some answers suggest a performative view, so to speak, of the academic use of the concept of ‘religion’. Yulia Antonyan remarks à propos of this, ‘It may be that from the point of view of scholarship (or simply of common sense?), simply reinterpreting a well-known, familiar word, adding new meanings and excluding obsolete ones, offers better prospects than inventing a lot of new terms instead of one old one. Perhaps the fundamental task of the anthropology of religion is indeed the constant renewal of the discourse of the understanding of the term “religion” through the study of its various facets, manifestations, transformations of old meanings and identification of new ones.’ Michael Lambek writes

about the same thing: ‘Is the central issue the relationship of signifier to signified (word to referent) according to a correspondence theory of language? If so, then one way to read Talal Asad’s argument [Asad 1983] — which has been one of the most provocative and consequential interventions in the anthropological conversation concerning “religion” — is that the central problem with the term or concept is that it does not correspond to the phenomenon we assumed it did, which is actually something else. But a more pragmatic or Wittgensteinian approach to language suggests that the meaning or referent is found in the use of the term rather than in a single or stable object, something autonomously out there in the world and waiting to be apprehended by the right word or classificatory label.’

Despite the variety of approaches to the use of the concept of ‘religion’ that have been expressed, it is clear that its meaning in contemporary anthropology is partly paradoxical. On the one hand our discussion shows that there is no universal and generally accepted understanding of the term, and that its use leads inevitably to relativist reflection. On the other, many specialists (and for many reasons) are unprepared entirely to renounce religion as a significant academic concept. Among the means of ‘restoring’ the status of a fully-fledged object of anthropological research to religion, the most prominent seems to us to be the ‘ontological approach’ based on a critical re-evaluation of the ‘classical’ theories and discursive norms of the social sciences.

* * *

The question of the scholar’s involvement (or uninvolvedness) in the religious culture that is being studied is much less often discussed in the scholarly literature, but there is a tradition of discussion here too. Thus Laur Vallikivi recalls that in the academic milieu itself people take an apprehensive, if not prejudiced view of a scholar’s interest in certain religious groups (particularly Christian). In this context he recalls Fenella Cannell’s words that ‘It is surprising how many colleagues assume that a research interest in a topic in Christianity implies that one must be a closet evangelist, or at least “in danger” of being converted — an assumption that would not be made about anthropologists working with most groups of people around the world.’ Indeed, the academic milieu often displays acute concern at the prospect of members (or opponents) of religious groups studying those groups and their practices at non-denominational research institutions.

Scholars who study religion always have to be ready to answer questions (or react to guesses) about their own involvement with the groups or cultures that they study, and not only in the field, but also in their offices. This is how Art Leete describes the problem: ‘It is

somehow odd that during the official census, I am allowed to withdraw from answering the question concerning my religious preference but in scholarly practice it is examined rather carefully and confidentiality is not the issue.' A little earlier Leete had specially indicated that it is the ideas of cultural distance between the scholar and his / her subject that play the decisive part here: 'It is much more easy to approach animistic perspective in this sense. If we are at least somehow sympathetic towards animist views we do not risk harming somebody as easily as it may happen while doing anthropology of Christianity. Colleagues, as well, are not taking seriously the possibility that a scholar may consider genuinely the possibility to commit oneself to any animist way to understand the world. But they become much more suspicious if one starts to study the Christians.' Incidentally, when it is a question of studying new Protestant churches or other groups that are active in mission, attention to whether the researcher might not have become an 'adept' of the new faith becomes particularly relevant. Igor Mikeshin gives the following reasoned explanation of this: 'Such [Evangelical Christian] groups in principle consider any contact with outsiders as an opportunity for evangelism, and view anthropological research as God's work through people and circumstances to bring the anthropologist to Christ. In this connection, the most serious (and, in the opinion of many outside observers, the most unceremonious) attention to the personality and personal convictions of any potential convert, including ethnographers, is characteristic of these groups. Therefore one might get the impression that the inclusion of the identity of the researcher in the analytical model is particularly characteristic of the study of Christianity.'

Without giving any evaluation of such a situation, we will note that at present it is a commonplace that a researcher who 'works' with religion must take into account the academic tradition that demands a certain reticence in working with 'material' of this sort. This is how Virginie Vaté has formulated these expectations: 'The "personal standpoint of the individual scholars" is important in the anthropology of religion because <...> readers of ethnographic accounts of religious practices might suspect that the results are biased if the anthropologist is an adherent of the religion in question or is fundamentally opposed to it.' Anastasia Mitrofanova considers that, on the contrary, the study of certain questions of religious life is impossible if the researcher does not have any experience similar to that being studied: 'A person may have a profound emotional connection with the objects of religious worship which he / she, subjectively, experiences no less strongly than his / her connections with the people close to him / her. If the researcher does not know such feelings, there is a strong possibility that he / she will not understand them and will not even believe in their existence. <...> Mystical experiences of

various kinds are also encountered in the life of religious people. I have in mind not only the complex visionary experience of a Swedenborg or a Daniil Andreev, but the everyday mystical experience that accompanies religious practice. If the researcher is a complete stranger not only to the religion that he / she is studying, but to any religion at all, there is a chance that he / she will be unable to fit information of this kind into his / her conception, or will even discard it as an illusion. <...> A religious group may be studied like any other group: power relations within it or economic activity. But if the aim is to penetrate the inner world of a religious person, that can probably only be done by a researcher who has analogous experience of his / her own.'

We must admit that we rarely encounter students of religion who are capable of dismissing information about mystical experience because they regard it as an illusion. Even when they are committed sceptics, our colleagues will try to find an explanation for such 'illusions', even if these explanations will not coincide with those offered by the mystics themselves. More important here, though, is another perspective. A researcher in the field may orient towards acquiring new experiences, which may be called religious. Daria Dubovka regards this as a natural component of the research: 'For me a researcher's involvement in a religious tradition and proselytism by informants seem to be phenomena with a common basis, namely the conviction that one can understand someone else only if one has similar experience. In anthropology this principle is the cornerstone of many theories, and is the basic method of the discipline: participant observation. I understand the researcher's personal involvement in the sense of a desire and readiness to experience for himself / herself what the informants regularly undergo, be it meditation for many hours or vigil services, the narrativisation of one's life in the Christian categories of sin and virtue, or an idea of the karmic connectedness of one's acts. And in this sense the expectation of a religious community that the anthropologist will follow their practices, at least up to a point, is a regular expectation, insofar as anthropology is constructed on the same postulate of knowledge through practice.'

The question of research experience (not necessarily mystical) is important, if not critical for some of our authors. This experience, irrespective of the scholar's religious identity, may hinder work in the field or the activity of interpretation (in the latter case, from the academic community's point of view). However, the main conclusion that can be drawn from the discussion of this question may be an assertion that an 'insider' position on the researcher's part is insufficient for his / her results to be acknowledged as successful. Simon Coleman reminds us that the social scientists possess quite a solid set of instruments. These instruments may ensure that a patient and self-effacing scholar gains access to materials and conclusions

that the non-specialist (including the academic non-specialist) regards as inaccessible to the uninitiated. 'I am largely sceptical of the idea that religious "insiders" inherently possess privileged, consistent, and exclusive access to a realm of religious understanding that is entirely beyond the comprehension of the non-believing ethnographer. In this sense I do not agree with Evans-Pritchard's famous assertion (from the standpoint of a believer) that religion can only be grasped from within. To suggest that the interpretative frames of informants are fundamentally different from or inaccessible to those of the ethnographer specifically because of the possession of a mysterious yet substantive thing called "belief" begs at least as many questions as it answers. Religious commitments ebb and flow, are enmeshed within wider aesthetic practices, are constituted within but also beyond sacred spaces and times, and may be cross-cut by other forms of commitment and experience.'

'As Magnus Marsden and Konstantinos Retsikas have recently argued in a book called *Articulating Islam* [Marsden, Retsikas 2013], anthropologists need to focus in much finer detail on the circumstances in and practices through which Islam is invoked, thus taking account of the existential uncertainties that mark the day-to-day life of humans, as well as the conscious thinking and position-taking of people of Muslim background in relation to particular circumstances and contexts. Such recognition extends the bounds and the challenges of our fieldwork, but it also involves many more points of ethnographic access to a "religious tradition" than merely attending a mosque or prayer group.'

That is, the success of a researcher's work is not determined by his / her religious or other identity. But we must take into account that the study of religion, like the study of anything else, does modify this identity. Sometimes this leads to an alienation from the group that it is impossible to overcome. But sometimes new prospects open out before a person. Thus Yulia Antonyan recalls a colleague 'whose field of interest was polytheistic religions', and who 'became seriously interested in the possibility of becoming the priestess of a neopagan community'.

* * *

What happens to researchers in the field and afterwards is often described through the discourse of social identity — of belonging to and / or being opposed to a particular group. There is nothing specific about this: everyone resolves such questions every day with varying degrees of adroitness. But the other question — establishing a certain distance between the researcher and the group being studied, or, to put it more simply, other people who usually start off as strangers — is for the anthropologist one of the most important, and at very different stages of research. Even when it seems to be finished, and

the anthropologist is writing up, for example, his / her dissertation, he / she must take care to assure the reader of two things. The first is that the author of the research has got close enough to the group being studied to be able to see details hitherto hidden from external observers. The second is that as he / she became immersed in the contemplation of ethnographic details, they did not lose the capacity to make generalisations beyond the framework of their ethnography. Texts written by an anthropologist of religion (but of course this is not unique to such texts) will also be evaluated by yet another parameter. Colleagues will observe very closely whether they have distanced themselves sufficiently — or are they apologists for the religious movement being studied who are using the authority of academe to propagate a particular doctrine, or, on the other hand and even worse, trying to denigrate people whose behaviour they were unable or unwilling to understand.

The most important aspect of an anthropologist's work with distance is, of course, the problem of overcoming it. The researcher usually approaches the other people uninvited and tries to explain to them why they should co-operate and offer hospitality, and later acceptance almost as one of their own, if it gets as far as participant observation. Long negotiations about the status of an anthropologist's presence in the community may sometimes take a very dramatic turn and may last for years. This discussion often includes consideration of the scholar's right to write (or make a film) about the group under study. In other words, anthropologists must get permission from the members of the group whom they are studying (the people whom the anthropologists have nominated as 'a group') to show them to the wide world. It is obvious that a certain balance must be attained here. If anthropologists' contract (whether articulated or assumed) with the community being studied includes the right for those people to edit the resulting text, the researchers cannot describe the group in a way that the people who are supervising the portrait do not want it represented. But at the same time an anthropologist cannot simply be the group's PR manager, even if the work is done through the medium of academic writing. Leonard Primiano has given a lively and convincing description of the history of one such negotiation in his reply.

When they shorten the distance between themselves and their field, the researchers find that they must solve another problem: how to stop the distance from disappearing altogether. This is how Daria Dubovka deals with the problem of being subsumed into the culture under study, which threatens the researcher with becoming nothing more than a translator of the representative texts that are composed there: 'How can I keep my distance as a researcher? The way out for me is a wider synchronic and diachronic context for the research, which allows the group being studied to be relativised. I do not think

that there is an even balance between immersion and relativisation: if, for example, according to spiritual practice I should be attending only to my own actions and seeking out imperfection within myself, and at the same time I am studying the hierarchies of power in the community, that is the end of my spiritual career. But most of the people in religious groups are not saints either, so such research will still reflect their expectations and actions. In this way there is a constant switching of perspective: the distancing of the object of study and the immersion of it in a wider historical context, and the closest possible approach to the emic vision — for me this is the basis of any anthropological study.'

So we must be prepared to distance ourselves from the field and the experience we acquire there when this is required by our own sense of psychological insecurity or by the system of academic conventions which work more reliably and severely than many a written law. Robert Orsi well described the operation of this outlook in a vivid passage which addresses back at the initiators of this discussion a question which will be treated a little further on: 'Have you ever encountered rejection, contempt, and humiliation among your academic colleagues when you displayed your willingness to enter the religious worlds of others on terms that refused to translate them into the categories of modern analysis that reassure your colleagues of the givenness of their world?'

This willingness to enter the religious worlds of others may frighten some of our colleagues and delight others. It is less often that we encounter arguments explaining what we might get if we make up our minds to take part in the religious practices characteristic of the group being studied, to 'immerse ourselves' in their experience, including physical experience. Sonja Luehrmann sets out consistent arguments in favour of her decision to pray with Orthodox Christians while not being one of the adherents of the church that she was studying: 'Some anthropologists deliberately stand back during occasions of embodied worship, allowing their visible non-participation to be a mark of their identity as a researcher [Engelhardt 2014]. Others find it easier to participate in embodied acts such as singing, dancing, and holding hands, presumed to be less ideologically charged than sermons, personalised prayers, and verbal testimonials [Coleman 2008]. I, by contrast, am very conscious that I tend to enter a mode of prayer when others are praying around me, no matter what theological differences or closeness I feel with them. When I am surrounded by people who pray, I tap into a trait that the anthropologist Tanya Luehrmann calls absorption, drawing on a concept developed by the psychologist Auke Tellegen: "a disposition for having moments of total attention that somehow completely engage all of one's attentional resources" [Luehrmann 2012: 199]. <...>'

‘For me, one of the main insights gained from allowing myself to get absorbed is that prayer is not empty time, but work. Mental exhaustion from the effort of maintaining focus and equanimity during prayer is as real as physical exhaustion from standing with heavy ritual regalia or walking miles on an empty stomach. It helps explain some of the more shocking moments of research on Orthodox family values <...>’

‘As we aim to learn not just from the words of our “informants”, but from participating in their actions, our bodies inform on us as much as they help us understand others. And even as disagreements remain at intellectual and visceral levels, researchers are changed in their own sensibilities.’

However, we cannot always assess the situation soberly, weigh up the pros and cons, and so on, and so shorten or lengthen the distance between ourselves and the community or phenomenon that we are studying at our own discretion. Sometimes the situation in which we find ourselves during fieldwork leaves us no choice of identification strategies, and defines the point in the social field that we must occupy. Laur Vallikivi points out one sure means of creating distance between ourselves as researchers and ourselves as ‘participant observers’, that is, practically inhabitants of the world which we are trying to study: ‘I hope that in our endeavour to take religion seriously we would not lose our ability to detect and use humour. Jokes and laughter constitute an important part of what makes life (and field) liveable.’

* * *

We ourselves are usually the ones who work on the nature of the relationship between us and the people whose life we are studying during fieldwork. Not everything depends on us, but the responsibility for the result of the research is the researcher’s own. We must bear in mind that in the field we enter into relationships of moral obligation towards other people, and that this may have its consequences, for example, the requirement to adopt that way of life and faith in which we have shown such an empathetic interest. Robert Orsi has preferred to express this problem in quite acute terms of the corporate unconscious, that raises ‘the anxiety that “they” will suborn “us” into “their” world, that almost against our wills and intentionality, we will slide from our world into theirs.’ Orsi considers that when the question is put in this way, ‘the religious other <...> is endowed with the malignant power to speak directly to the scholar’s unconscious, where the unacknowledged desires that impelled him / her to this particular field-site or historical event reside, and thus transforming the scholar into the very subjectivity he / she fears to become (but by which he / she is so fascinated).’

This situation in the field, which is particularly typical for research into religious currents that are active in mission, is described in a rather more down-to-earth manner by Art Leete. Such groups' openness to the researcher is directly connected with the believers' hopes that he / she will be converted to their faith and be saved, preferably in their church. When a researcher who has acquainted himself / herself with the religious practice and doctrine of the group on which he / she is working and shows no signs of hostility but on the contrary continues to be present among them, this is perceived as evidence of his / her readiness to convert. The believers begin to display an insistence which drives one to offer politely to change the subject of the conversation or to admit that one is not ready to take the next step along the road into the world of faith, for example, 'to receive Christ into one's heart':

'I suppose that it actually suits the Protestants, as well, if I claim that I do not know yet how I feel about taking Jesus into my heart. In this case, only God knows. But over the years, people become somehow sceptical as no change in my attitude can be detected. Apparently, they still think that God is supposed to act a bit quicker.'

This situation of urgent expectation is familiar to many people who work in Protestant churches. Virginie Vaté has encountered a similar problem: 'As in other Pentecostal communities <...>, my presence in their church and my interest in them were interpreted as God's will. Though not solving completely the issue of "belief", this attitude on the part of members of the Pentecostal community provided me with a sort of legitimacy. The question remains whether the anthropologist can remain non-committal for an indefinite period of time or whether or not tensions necessarily arise, due to community expectations that outsiders will eventually convert.'

However, means of forcing religious conversion, albeit not as direct as an invitation to public repentance (altar call), may be found in other religious cultures as well. Detelina Tocheva, who did her fieldwork in Orthodox parishes in North-West Russia, calls such techniques 'strategies of inclusion'. In her reply she gives several expressive examples of how these mechanisms work. Here is one: 'my close informants always expected that I would start showing signs of adherence to their faith, especially through bodily practice. This was suggested indirectly and gently, with no pressure. For instance, once I had tied my headscarf in a particularly tight way and had put a skirt which nearly touched the ground. A middle-aged woman who had a fascination for ascetic practices, and who was very kind and open with me, commented on my outlook with a large smile by saying that I looked "exactly like one of us" (*"Ona pryamo kak nasha"*). Her apparently insignificant and friendly words encapsulated the double perception that the expectation that I become "one of

them” was real, but that bodily attitudes, although largely valued, were not sufficient to make me “one of them”, but simply look “exactly like” them.’

Commenting on her observations, Tocheva writes that there is a tendency in the Russian Orthodox Church that makes it close to proselytising movements, by which she evidently means religious group of the new Protestant type. We can agree that in all these religious cultures there is, on the basis of their Christian anthropology, an assumption that real spiritual life presupposes a transformation of the self. The believers strive to discern in themselves and others signs of spiritual growth. However, in the case described by Detelina Tocheva we are dealing not simply with the believers’ desire to be the initiators and witnesses of the birth of the new man, but rather they expect the person to be incorporated into the Church, accepted as a member of the family who needs only a very little in order fully to be absorbed into the community of the faithful. Of course, not every religious field exposes the researcher to such spiritual adventures. In many situations his / her readiness to accept a new faith will be greeted rather with surprise. However, considerations of the problem of the confrontation of research interests and missionary efforts directed at the researcher himself / herself provide rich material for understanding where certain sore points of the ethnographic study of religion are to be found.

Moments like this allow the scholar to see his / her ‘object’ as a ‘subject’ with its own will and interests. Our authors write of the asymmetry in the definition by the researcher and by the members of the religious group of that degree to which the scholar shares the religious doctrine and ideology of his / her informants. Yulia Antonyan writes about how unexpected she found her problems with the neopagans whom she had befriended, ‘precisely because I never raised objections to anything they asserted. This was probably perceived as a readiness to convert, since I had only to make certain incautious comments in a recent public lecture concerning the discourse about “the genetics of the nation” to unleash a storm of bewilderment, disappointment and resentment from my neopagan friends, who suddenly discovered that I did not share some of their fundamental convictions. Judging by some of the comments that reached me, they seem to have decided that this was a temporary madness, the influence of external evil forces.’ However, some colleagues find it more acceptable for themselves not to hold any opinion of their own, and entirely to avoid any communicative situations in which an exchange of opinions on doctrinal or other issues which were essential to the group would be inevitable or at least expected. Anastasia Mitrofanova writes that her task is not ‘to dispel other people’s errors, but to understand what moves a particular person and how he / she constructs his / her life. It will be intellectually

productive to leave off discussing doctrine and move on to the mechanisms by which the community functions and other subjects which do not require the researcher to share the point of view of the people in whom he / she is interested.'

When we say that in conducting fieldwork we become the object of a particular practical interest on the part of the people whom we are studying, we should not forget that proselytism is only the most vivid, but by no means the only aspect of that interaction. Representatives of small religious groups who feel vulnerable in a world about them that is ill-disposed towards them, often see researchers not as potential co-religionists, but rather as examples of how the wide world can relate to them with sympathy and understanding. Simon Coleman, comparing his experience of working in churches that are active in mission and in 'quiet' traditional denominations, writes: 'In all of my "religious" fieldwork — in Pentecostal churches, hospital chaplaincies, pilgrimage sites, and cathedrals — informants have themselves been interested in the uses they might make of the anthropological "knowledge" I was producing. In fact, this tendency has been most evident in the least "conversionist" context — that of cathedrals, which are run by staff intensely self-conscious over the role of "religion" in a country such as England. Thus while I have not found pressure to convert, I have had to negotiate the "encompassment" and deployment of my work by informants for their own purposes.'

* * *

When they reflect on how our activity is influenced by the fact that our texts, which are intended for academic work, are read by the 'world at large', the participants in the forum have mentioned several problems.

First — and it is not only in the passage just quoted from Simon Coleman's reply that this is referred to — we have to think about how our text may be employed by representatives and leaders of the groups that we are studying. And although it would seem that we do not have to worry about what happens next, so long as we have been honest and scrupulous in our dealings with them (including textual dealings), it is not so simple when it is a matter of competition between groups, one of which we may be unintentionally supporting. This is possible, for instance, when we depict a particular group as an actual or potential victim, which, in present-day conditions, when suffering (such as the memory of repression by the state) may be turned into moral capital and give the leaders of that group the advantage over others.

Still, the use of our texts by the people about whom we write sometimes becomes a matter of professional pride, since it tells us (and our

colleagues) that we have managed not only to make ourselves necessary, but also, up to a point, to have learnt their language and understand how they see the world. The reading of our work in the community being studied may even be a stimulus to continue the research, since the reaction to it produces new utterances, which would not have arisen in any other context.

‘The informants’ reaction to the research becomes a part of it. In this way the research does not end with the writing up and publication of the text, it continues, one might say, spontaneously, since it is on the basis of informants’ reactions that the social discourse on the topic is composed and it is possible to see the real disposition of forces and influences, the distribution, recognisability and similar perception of ideas, practices, signs, stereotypes and so on, and finally identify a series of meanings hitherto unclear and hidden behind the conventions of social interrelationships. At a wider level of comparisons, the ‘primary’ academic text may become the provocation that models a concrete situation, which gives the anthropologist the possibility of working practically in “laboratory” conditions’ (Yulia Antonyan).

However, on the whole the fate of our work without our supervision often becomes a source of concern. The first thing that worries authors is the reaction of members of the group being studied. There is, after all, a lot that could irritate them. For example, professional language and discursive habits (‘it is precisely the neutral, secular tone of description and analysis proper to academic texts that may seem offensive to a religious person’ — Yulia Antonyan), or the discrepancy between our behaviour in the field and what we write: ‘In the process of the interview an anthropologist is often required to give at least an external expression of agreement with the thoughts, ideas and norms that are part of the religious identity of the persons being studied <...>. The researcher must create the illusion of loyalty, that is pretend that he / she at least has no serious objections. But when we write our texts often what we are engaged in is the deconstruction of what makes up the essence of the convictions and practices of the religious community being studied. When an anthropologist’s behaviour is compared with his / her texts it may well create an impression of hypocrisy, and even of malice (if the informants are inclined towards conspiracy theory)’ (Yulia Antonyan).

But of course, the thing which we fear most of all is causing involuntary harm to the people with whom it has been our lot to work, and whose hospitality (even if sometimes enforced hospitality) we have enjoyed. Unfortunately, this is an entirely realistic prospect, which frequently makes researchers take difficult decisions in the area of self-censorship.

As we have seen, the work of social researchers may sometimes be difficult both on the intellectual and on the emotional level. But it seems that the number of people ready to embark on this difficult journey continues to grow. And if we try to understand what motivates them, we can define it in the phrase 'Things here aren't as simple as they might seem.'

We are grateful to everyone who has taken part in our discussion.

References

- Asad T., 'Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz', *Man*, 1983, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 237–59.
- Cannell F., 'Introduction: The Anthropology of Christianity', Cannell F. (ed.), *The Anthropology of Christianity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006, pp. 1–50.
- Coleman S., 'The Abominations of Anthropology: Christianity, Ethnographic Taboos, and the Meanings of "Science"', Pine F., de Pina-Cabral J. (eds.), *On the Margins of Religion*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2008, pp. 39–58.
- Engelhardt J., *Singing the Right Way: Orthodox Christians and Secular Enchantment in Estonia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, XXII+268 pp.
- Evans-Pritchard E. E., *Theories of Primitive Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, 140 pp.
- Geertz C., 'Religion as a Cultural System', Geertz C., *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973, pp. 87–125.
- Hann C. M., 'The Anthropology of Christianity per se', *Archives of European Sociology*, 2007, vol. 48, no. 3, pp. 383–410.
- Hann C. M., Goltz H. (eds.), *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010, 392 pp.
- Harding S., 'Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other', *Social Research*, 1991, vol. 58, no. 2, pp. 373–93.
- Luhrmann T. M., *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*. New York: Vintage, 2012, 464 pp.
- Marsden M., Retsikas K., 'Introduction', Marsden M., Retsikas K. (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*. Heidelberg: Springer, 2013, pp. 1–31.
- Rappaport R., *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 535 pp.
- Riesebrodt M., "'Religion": Just Another Western Construction?', Religion and Culture Web Forum (The Martin Marty Center for the Advanced Study of Religion, University of Chicago Divinity School). 2003, December. <<http://divinity.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/imce/pdfs/webforum/122003/riesebrodtessay.pdf>>.
- Taves A., *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009, 232 pp.

Torchinov E. A., *Religii mira: Opyt zapredelnogo: Psikhotehnika i transpersonalnye sostoyaniya* [Religions of the World: Experience of Transcendental: Psychotechnics and Transpersonal Conditions]. St Petersburg: Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie, 1998, 384 pp. (In Russian).

Whitehouse H., Laidlaw J. (eds.), *Religion, Anthropology and Cognitive Science*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2007, 312 pp.

*The answers originally in Russian were translated
by Ralph Cleminson*