## What is the meaning of the term “religion”?

Dear colleagues! I’m glad to introduce you my small research concerning a very important problem: What is the meaning of the term “religion”? Quite often not only in ordinary language, but even in special literature the term "religion" is used without clarification of sense and volume of the concept. Perhaps, we just pragmatically use it as required – in literal (as it seems to us) or in a metaphorical sense. And, really, when we read that the Cro-Magnons buried their died tribesmen (most often – the head to the East) and made over them a funeral ceremony, we understand that it was the manifestation of the archaic religiousness. Ritual eating of the crocodile by the tribe of Hottentots is a religiousness manifestation too; Sunday mass; the shamanistic ritual; meditations of Taoists or Buddhists; the yogi who is stiffened in a lotus pose; crying of the Prophet Jeremiah; the dervish who is infinitely turning under the flute sounds; the murder ("the sacrifice") of 666 cats by the modern Satanist – is there anything in common between them?! And, on the other hand, the Russian Bolsheviks going to death for the sake of their faith in the bright future of the mankind; or people, tremblingly and with delight tears looking at the flag of their state or listening to its anthem – are they not religious?... Perhaps, any person is religious even if he does not know it as Moliere’s Monsieur Jourdain did not know that he had told all his life by prose?... Is not “religion” an empty concept, in this case?

Nevertheless, for the philosophy of religion it is necessary to find out the volume and meaning of the concept. Here we see many difficulties. Since etymology there is a set of problems. The point of view is standard that the term "religion" comes from the Latin verb “religare” – "to connect" and is interpreted as the "Union". But "union" has to be first of all the union of “someone” with another "someone". Such situation is quite obvious to religions of a Bible root (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) where there is the One God – the Creator, the Pro-thinker, the Almighty. However any person familiar with East religions, can understand that the absence of God in such religions as early Buddhism, Jainism and Taoism assumes that there is no the one with whom to establish ***the Union*** (and often no the one who could establish it – the doctrine of ānātmavada in Buddhism, for example).

The definitions of religion can be divided on 1) the "essentialistic", i.e. aspiring for revealing the very essence of religion and 2) the descriptive ones, which usually seek to reveal the certain general property, inherent, from the point of view of the author of definition, to all existing forms of religion. "Essentialistic" definitions were in most cases not free from ideological connotations and assumed this or that quite certain world outlook of the author of such definition, as well as its recipient. So, Emmanuel Kant’s definition of religion as the execution of moral duties "as though they were ordered by God" works only within Kant’s "as though" philosophies. Hegelian definition of religion as a form of self-knowledge of the Absolute Spirit is acceptable only for the hegelianist. Marxist understanding of religion as an illusory form of reflection of reality is acceptable only for the person standing on atheistic Marxist positions. Respectively, Freudian definition of religion as the child's neurosis of mankind is acceptable only for those who stand within the world outlook of the doctrine of psychoanalysis. Etc. Certainly, it cannot be considered as a shortcoming. However such definitions pretend for universality, and there is also a set of problems…

Let us consider the descriptive definitions. As for understanding of religion as faith in the One God, or in a number of gods or spirits, this statement does not deserve any serious polemics. The ideas of theism and the more so – creationism are present ***not*** in all religions. For example, in the East religions – Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism – the recognition or non-recognition of the existence of gods or spirits does not at all play an essential role.

Now – as for understanding of religion as the "faith in supernatural". At first sight, it is quite obvious: what religion can not but include faith in supernatural?! But theoretical consideration of this problem causes serious difficulties. The concept "supernatural" means something super-natural, otherworldly, trnascendent to nature. But we cannot say that to criterion "of faith in supernatural" there correspond all forms of religion. It is obvious that to it do not correspond the archaic forms of religiousness and non-theistic religions mentioned above – Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, etc. To the criterion of faith in "supernatural" strictly satisfy only religions of the Bible root – Judaism, Christianity, Islam. The idea of transcendent God, space creatureness, a miracle as the Divine intervention breaking the laws of nature established by God is inherent just in these religions.

At the same time there are the extra-religious forms of spiritual culture assuming if not faith in supernatural, then, at least, recognition of its existence. Any form of philosophy proving existence of certain transcendent (in ontological sense) realities, is such. Plato’s world of ideas, the universalia of medieval realists, "thing-in-itself" of Kant, the "Absolute Idea" of Hegel, "the world of values" of Baden school of neo-kantianism, "the Reigns of Being" of J. Santayana and many other concepts confirm the justice of this thesis… So, neither the concept of “supernatural” is an adequate characteristic of religion, nor “faith in supernatural” is a sufficient criterion for the reference of this or that phenomenon of spiritual culture to religion.

Émile Durkheim, and after him Mircea Eliade, pointed as to the main “marker” of religion a dichotomy, the binary opposition "sacral – profane". But in many religious traditions the whole life of the adherent is sacralized, just the sacrality degrees differ… Well, if one member of the opposition "sacral – profane" disappears, respectively, also the opposition itself disappears. Moreover, many religious traditions see in the basic destruction of this opposition the purpose of religious pragmatics of the doctrine – for example, the Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Russian researcher Evgeny Torchinov (following psychologist Stanislav Grof) considered as fundamentals of any religion the transpersonal experience. "Trans-personal", by definition, means the transcendence of any empirical identity; however it occurs "inside", and by means of self-deepening, through opening, for example, "the original Ego" inside the empirical one, the experience of death and resurrection, the expansion of consciousness, etc. Certainly, patterns of the transpersonal experience (their description is fascinating, but, alas, is not included in the problem of our research) – they are present both in the advanced, and archaic forms of religions. At the same time we can find out those patterns of transpersonal experience also in quasi-religions parasitizing on traditional religions and in the secular cults. In the quasi-religions the people, or some form or a stage of the development of society, or the highest ideal of mankind are idolized. We can take Russian Bolshevism and German national-socialism as examples… So, in the long term of "absoluteness" of the transpersonal experience we cannot distinguish religion from the quasi-religion or a secular cult at all.

I suppose, we can affirm that the concept "religion" is noumenal. In Emmanuel Kant's philosophy, as we know, “noumena” the aprioristic ideas of a pure, i.e. not relying on experience, reason, are called. It is the theological idea (God), the psychological idea (personal immortality, substantiality of a soul), and the cosmological idea (the world as a whole; freedom as preceding causality dominating in the world of phenomena). These ideas as they have no basis in experience, do not demonstrate the existence of what is conceived in them. Nevertheless, the ideas of pure reason, according to Kant, certainly are necessary and heuristically fruitful: they are the constitutive principles which optimum synthesize the variety of knowledge. In our opinion, we can follow Kant and say that the concept "religion" plays a role of a constitutive principle synthesizing the variety of types and forms of historical religions, and also different types of knowledge of religion (history of religions, psychology, sociology, phenomenology of religion, philosophy of religion)…

Thank you!