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宗教研究與敘事理論

Religious Studies and the Narrative Theory

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to present the ideas and the theoretical background for the use of the narrative theory in the field of religious studies.

First it describes the historical background of the religious studies, focusing on the evolving idea of the 'religious' as a culture-specific concept, rooted in the European Judeo-Christian tradition. With time, the theological ideas became secularized and used as general categories describing the world. These kind of narratives could have remained part of only a particular culture, but during the colonial times they have been imported and forced upon the rest of the world. The ideas became prevalent not because their intellectual superiority, but because of the military superiority and aggressiveness of the colonizing forces. The second part introduces the basics of the narrative theory as an alternative approach to analyze and understand the multitude of different narratives by recognizing their common elements and structure. The last part gives examples how to use the narrative theory in the religious studies.

Because of the generally accepted ways of thinking about this topic are pervading our understanding of it, in order to break away from them there is a need to examine the historical and cultural situation where the idea of 'religion', as it exists in the modern language, was born. To break with the traditional way of examination concerning the subject of religious studies we need a radical change in the thought-pattern, a *paradigm shift*. In this paper this paradigm shift is represented by the realization of the narrative nature of the descriptions of the religious studies and by the propagation of alternative narratives.

Keywords: religious studies, ideology, narrative theory, colonization, post-colonial theory, cultural relativity, paradigm shift

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Chapter I: Introduction

1. Problems

The basic problem that this paper will explore is the meaning and usefulness of the category of 'religion' and the 'religious-secular' distinction. We will approach every kind of descriptions as narratives, not only the so called 'religious' texts, but the products of the academical researches, especially in the field of religious studies. Examining them on the same bases we will point out the difficulties, and the possible faults, of representing a specific narrative through the categories of an other narrative. Moreover, we will explore in what sense, and in which situations is it possible to use a narrative that is capable of describing an other one in a fruitful way.

This paper will critically reflect on the concepts and methods used in the religious studies. It will focus on several questions that can be raised during the critical examination of the methodologies of this field. For example, the problem of definition: in many studies we have met several definitions and descriptions of the nature or the function of religion. However, until now, no generally accepted definition has been created. On the contrary it is generally accepted that it is not easy to give an accurate definition. This can raise the questions whether it is possible to define religion at all? If it is not possible to give an accurate definition then we have the right to doubt the word's concrete meaning. If it is without concrete meaning then what is the origin and function of this distinction?

How does the notion of an objective quality, the 'religious' arise? What is the rational basis of keeping the religious-secular distinction, even though it is often contradictory? This contradiction we can see in grouping different ideas under the category as religious. For example, the thoughtless meditative state of a Buddhist monk, the philosophical writing of a Christian apologist and the circumcision of a Jewish child are all considered as religious. Is it possible to find any inherently common element in these that makes them belong to one group? Or on the other hand we often see similar kind of phenomena placed into two exclusive categories in the religious-secular division. For example, the distinction between the deep belief in the Dharma[1] as a universal law and the deep

1 Referring to the dharma in Hinduism.

belief in the Human Rights as a universal law. Is there any rational basis that makes one belief religious and the other secular?

We will examine the concept of 'religion' as a culture related idea, and we will present the narrative theory as a theoretical background for the understanding of any discourse, not only expressed in language, but in conceptual thinking. By exploring the universal characteristics of every narratives and realizing the descriptions of the religious studies as being only one of the numerous possibilities, we will approach these problems as a tension between the goal of research and an inappropriate narrative.

2. Methodology

The paper mainly will focus on philosophical research. Although it will use some data from the fieldworks of other scholars, it will do it only if it will foster the understanding of the primary issue. The main purpose is to present the ideas and the theoretical background for the use of narrative theory in the religious studies. To make it clear that why is it seems necessary to use a new system in the religious research, we will introduce the problem from different approaches. Because of the generally accepted methodologies and ways of understanding of this topic pervade our thinking about it, there is a need to examine the roots of the religious studies itself. But this not going to be a historical recollection of the important events for the discipline of religious studies, rather it will be an exploration of the historical and cultural situation where the idea of 'religion', as it exists in the modern language, was born. The idea in its complete form originates from the 19th century Europe, from a Judeo-Christian environment with specific economical and political situations.

The whole body of the collected ideas of a person or the similar ideas of a group of people concerning a given topic, reclining upon Ricoeur's writings, we will call *ideology*. The whole system of ideology where the religious studies was born we consider an *ethnocentric* formation in contrast with our point of view which propagates *cultural relativism*. The categories and the way of expression that is generally found in the religious studies concerning the nature of religion or religions, regarding the religious-secular distinction, we consider as specific expressions of a sociocultural medium. The words and the ideas originally could not be found in every culture, but they have been imported during the process of *colonization*. For the general academical studies the effect of *modern-colonization* and *neo-colonization* has great importance. In this sense the countries emerged from similar sociocultural medium, merely by their superiority in military power, later because of monetary advantage, has “forced” their ideology on the colonized countries. To describe this situation we refer to the *post-colonial theory* to reveal *cultural imperialism*.

Two fields of philosophy will be often discussed together in this paper, the narrative theory and the theory of ideology, because in this study they are complements to each other. In our research we will use the words 'ideology' and 'narrative' in a wide, philosophical sense, as the whole body of a person's thinking on a given topic (ideology), and its active component to understand and describe (narrative). These two concepts are inseparable from each other. The ideology is the framework of a

person's thinking and the narrative is the process of conceptual understanding as it is recreated in language. These qualities are always active in every human without exception. There is no ideology-free thinking, consequently all explanations are narratives. The problem with the general approach to understand and describe religions lies in the intention to describe the phenomena from an ideology-free position.

As Ricoeur pointed out, the historiography can not be separated from the narrative and there are similarities between the narratives of history and fiction. We would like to make a similar parallel between fiction and the history of religions.

To break with the traditional way of examination, concerning the subject of religious studies, we need a radical change in the thought-pattern, a *paradigm shift*. In this paper this paradigm shift is represented by the realization of the narrative nature of the descriptions in the religious studies and by the propagation of alternative narratives.

3. Structure

The Paper can be divided into two main parts. The **first part** (Chapter II, III) will generally introduce the diversity of the problems that are raised by the concept of 'religion' and by the religious-secular distinction. This part will examine the idea of religion itself in a philosophical way. We will mention the origin of the word 'religion' in the language and the ways it has been used, then we will analyze the ideas connected to this word and their - often contradictory - nature. This part will present the *system of ideology,* as a description of the framework inherent in every human thinking, to apply it as the description of the thought-pattern that gave birth and maintains the existence of the ideas of '*religion*' (as a collective entity) and '*religions*' (as separated historical entities) on the one hand, and the *religious-secular* distinction on the other hand.

This problem can be approached from several ways but in this paper this will not be examined in all its diversity, the first part will serve as an introduction of the problem which will point to the direction of a possible solution.

The focus of the **second part** (Chapter IV, V) will be on the creative nature of understanding based on the narrative theory. We will describe – inspired by Ricoeur's writings - the narrative theory and use it in the field of religious studies to point out that the generally accepted way of researching religions, with the religious-secular distinction, basically leans on only one main type of narrative and interpretation of the phenomena. First we will present the general system of narrative theory adapted for a description of the nature of human understanding. After the introduction of the categories and methodologies of the narrative theory the focus will shift to the application of the system for the religious studies to reveal the nature of the problems described in the first part. In the end we will provide alternative approaches that excludes the religious-secular distinction and reinterprets the meaning of 'religion'.

4. Previous Writers

Besides the books of the traditional scholars of religious studies we will use the writings of authors from three fields: the study of *critical religion,* post-colonial theory and the narrative theory. The 'critical religion' means all those academical methods that pursue new ways to describe the religious phenomena by questioning the fundamental categories and methodologies of the religious studies. This field is often connected with the thinkers of post-colonialism.

About the topic of critical religion the paper will often lean on the writings of Dr. Timothy Fitzgerald, professor at the University of Stirling in Scotland, especially his book *The Ideology of Religious Studies*. He is a member of a research group that propagates a critical approach toward the study of religion. The meaning of 'critical religion' with his own words: "My principal theoretical pursuit is 'critical religion', by which I mean the critical deconstruction of religion as a powerful discourse and its parasitic relation to 'secular' categories such as politics and economics."[2]

Jonathan Z. Smith in his book *Imagining Religion – From Babylon to Jonestown* (1982) writes: "That is to say, while there is a staggering amount of data, of phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religious – *there is no data for religion*. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy."[3]

An other important book is Wilfred Cantwell Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1991). In the Introduction he writes: "Neither religion in general nor any one of the religions, I will contend, is in itself an intelligible entity, a valid object of inquiry or of concern either for the scholar or for the man of faith."[4]

This paper will follow the path of the former mentioned writers.

Gavin Flood in the 5th chapter of his book *Beyond Phenomenology – Rethinking the Study of Religion* (1999) gives a description about the use of narrative theory in the religious studies, but it seems he does not really belong to the critical thinkers.

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2 Critical Religion Research Group website; http://www.criticalreligion.stir.ac.uk/staff/dr-timothy-fitzgerald/
3 Smith, J.Z. (1982) p. xi
4 Smith, W.C. (1991) p.12

The first important writer on the topic of the effect of *colonization* and *post-colonialism* is Edward Said with his book *Orientalism* (1978). Edward Said was a well-known Palestinian-American literary theorist and critic. In his book he criticized the concept of orientalism, the artificial separation of the east and west. The root of this distinction came from the European colonization. When the Europeans met with the eastern civilizations they described it as an exotic, mystical world. The science of orientalism was established in order to study these 'exotic' cultures, and their descriptions never could get over this initial impression. The division of the world into two parts, the occident and the orient, had also other sides: they characterized the western world as civilized, superior and the holder of right understanding. The east at the same time became the uncivilized, inferior and barbaric world. These kind of descriptions justified the colonization and it became their duty to educate the uncivilized world. The attributes they associated with the orient were very subjective descriptions, but they became the standard descriptions of the orient not only in literary works but in scientific reports too. The duty of the post-colonialist writers is to get rid of these false, illusionary descriptions and show the real nature of their own cultures.

Other important writers on this topic are: Jean-Paul Sartre, Aimé Césaire (*Discourse on Colonialism*; 1950), Frantz Fanon (*Black Skin, White Masks*; 1952), Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*; 1961), Albert Memmi (*The Colonizer and the Colonized*; 1965), Kwame Nkrumah (*Consciencism*;1970), Ahmad, Aijaz (*In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literaturess*; 1994), Gandhi, Leela (*Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*; 1988)

On the topic of *ideology and narrative theory* we follow two sources. For one, the writings of Paul Ricoeur, relying mainly on his books: *From Text to Action* (1991) and the *Time and Narrative*, (3 volumes; 1984, 1985, 1988). We will use some concepts form him that describes the nature of the narratives, like temporality, plot and emplotment, and productive imagination. The basic idea of the creative nature of the narratives is also comes from him:

"In one way or another, all symbol systems contribute to shaping reality. More particularly, the plots that we invent help us to shape our confused, formless, and in the last resort mute temporal experience."[5]

The other important writer on this topic is Walter R. Fisher. His book the *Human*

5 Ricoeur (1991)

Communication As Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action describes most closely our approach toward the nature of human reconstruction of reality through storytelling.

"(1)Humans are... storytellers. (2) The paradigmatic mode of human decision making and communication is "good reasons," which vary in form among situations, genres, and media of communication. (3) The production and practice of good reasons are ruled by matters of history, biography, culture, and character along with the kinds of forces identified in the Frentz and Farrell language-action paradigm. (4) Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings - their inherent awareness of narrative probability, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing narrative fidelity, whether or not the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives... (5) The world as we know it is a set of stories that must be chosen among in order for us to live life in a process of continual re-creation"[6]

6 Fisher (1987) p. 5

Chapter II: On the origin of 'religion'

In this chapter we are going to examine the origin of the religious studies in a historical and a socio-cultural context. In contrast of the common descriptions of the 'history of religion', our approach is not to find a coherent group of religious phenomena in the history to present their evolution. We are going to show that the very concept of religion, as we understand today, is a new, modern idea. Besides its appearance during the last couple of hundred years it can not be found in the history. In order to understand the difference between the modern meaning of the word 'religion', a brief part will introduce the word's former appearances in language from the ancients to the modern time. Although the description will be confined to Europe, as it is the cradle of the religious studies and the English word 'religion', we will mention some of the similar words in other languages. This part will give some information about the former meanings of the word 'secular' too, as it is the counterpart of the 'religious'.

Then we will focus on the evolving idea of religion during history, by presenting how did the meaning of the word 'religion' reached its present form. To understand this we will try to sketch the world-view of the people in the earlier times, when there were no such conceptual distinction that would divide their lives into a religious and secular part. Our goal is to make it clear that this distinction is not inherent in the world, it does not come from observation, but it is an artificial, man-created concept.

In the last part we will show what kind of contradictions can be found in the generally accepted concepts of religion and what kind of problems arose from the division of people to religious and non-religious groups.

The topics presented in this chapter are introductory only, a deeper explanation of the historical and ideological background of the ideology of religion still needs further research. But for the understanding of the later chapters it is very important to understand this historical background. The main goal is to point out the need for a revision of categories in the religious studies and to help understand the role of the narrative theory in this field.

1. On the Etymology of the Word 'Religion'

In order to define a word it is a common practice to find its root, the original word where it came from. In the English language the origin of a word often can be traced back to the Latin language. In the scientific writings about religions we often meet an etymological analysis in the beginning, to give a better definition of the word. About this practice we have to mention that the etymology in itself is not a definition. The former uses of the word has not necessarily has anything to do with its modern usage. Sometimes relying only on etymology to define a word can be very misleading, because the role of the word in the language can change. But for a better understanding we still have to briefly introduce the origin of the word 'religion', on the one hand to put in in a historical context, and on the other hand it might help to reflect on it as a word with other meanings as well. The use of etymology was common practice for the ancient Greeks and Romans to define a word's meaning. Even today there are scholars who rely entirely on etymology to define meaning. We don't believe that the etymological analysis of the Latin word 'religio' would take us really closer to the understanding of its modern meaning, but it can show in what kind of circumstances has it been used.

The English word 'religion' comes from the Latin 'religio'. It has been used several ways in the history, it can mean: piety, reverence, holiness, sacredness, sanctity. Often connected with divinity, with God or the gods, like reverence for God or gods, fear of God. This reverence can be inward or manifested outside by ceremonies.[7]

There are different opinions about the origin of this word. There are two main derivations in the focus of the scholarly literature. Cicero[8] derived 'religio' from the word 'relegere' (re-leg re): 'to treat carefully'[9]. Relegere can be translated as: to gather, choose or read carefully, to read over again or to pay attention to, in contrast of 'nec-leg re' or 'neg-leg' re which mean neglect or disregard.

Most of the modern etymologists favor an other explanation, first introduced by Lactantius[10].

7 Lewis, C.T. and Short, C.,1879. *A Latin Dictionary.* New York: Clarendon Press [online edition]

8 Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC – 43 BC) was a Roman politician, political theorist, philosopher and one of Rome's greatest orators. He was also a lawyer and as a linguist and translator he created an important Latin philosophical vocabulary.

9 Cicero:De Natura Deorum; II, 28.

10 Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius (ca. 240 – ca. 320) was a Christian apologist, the advisor of Constantine I, the first Christian Roman emperor.

He derives religio from the word 'religare' with the meaning of 'to bond'[11]. It can also mean to bind back or behind, to bind or fasten up, to bind fast. It comes from the re (again) + ligare (to reconnect). St. Augustine[12] agrees with this derivation in Retractions[13], although in an earlier work, in the City of God[14] he derives it from religere in the sense of recovering (religentes) as the opposite of neglect (negligens)

Thomas Aquinas[15] introduces all these three explanations in the Summa Theologica[16], but he does not choose between them. For modern scholars the etymological research is usually a tool for a better understanding of the origin of religion, but for the writers of the old Christian world, like Thomas Aquinas, it was a tool to understand the meaning of the Christian religion. Perhaps the intentions of the ancient Christian and modern scholars has much more in common than we would first assume.

It is important to understand that these words we can find connected with the meaning of 'religion' are words of an ancient language, and they are part of that time's narrative. The narrative constructions are changing by time, so the reconstruction of meaning is not easy. Even if the word 'religio' is connected with the words like 'god' or 'God', we have to remember that the meanings of these words would require further research too, in order to fully recognize their position and meaning in an ancient narrative. Since people of that time used different words to describe their lives than people of the present time, we always have to keep in mind that we can easily impose modern meaning on them.

2. The Word 'Religion' in History

To find a precise meaning for the word 'religion' is not only a difficulty for its present usage in language, but it is also difficult to find the meaning in the past. Trough the history, this word has been used in a lot of different senses.[17] And there is no word exactly same as the English 'religion' in

11 Lactantius: Divinarum Institutionum; Book IV, Chapter 28.
12 Aurelius Augustinus Hipponensis (354 – 430). Latin-speaking philosopher and theologian, Bishop of Hippo Regius.
13 Augustinus: Retractationes; I, 8.
14 Augustinus: De Civitate Dei contra Paganos; X, 3
15 Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) was a scholastic philosopher, the greatest theologian of the Catholic Church.
16 Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologica; II-II Question 81, Article 1
17 Smith (1982) p.19

other languages, neither among the Indo-European languages, nor in Greek or Latin[18].

If we examine the historical records of the ancient religious writings we will find no traces of this concept. Probably, apart from a few exceptions[19], the notion of religion as a particular system of belief was unknown prior to the modern period. We can check the classical texts of Hinduism or Buddhism, Sanskrit or Pali, we will not find this kind of concepts of religion. Nor in the ancient Egyptian, nor classical Chinese, nor Hebrew of the Jewish scriptures, nor Greek of the New Testament.[20] All of these writings has no one single word that could be translated to our modern concept of religion or religions. It seems that the people of the old times did not described themselves and others in a religious-secular distinction. Would this mean that the people of that time did not realize such an important part of life? Or simply there was nothing to realize, because this kind of distinction did not make any sense. If this is the case, then what has changed with the modern time?

There were different words that we can connect with this modern concept, but we will not find any real analogy. Of course, they talked about different qualities, living matters that can be characterized as religious life. Qualities and concepts such as faith, obedience and disobedience, piety, worship, the truth in the ancient writings are somewhat close in meaning with the modern sense of religion. But even these words did not suggest a secular-religious distinction, and did not necessarily separated a specific life area from politics or economics. That kind of distinction which would make a clear separation, and would show the religion as a communally embodied system of belief was not present. Important to note, that two opposing groups with different ideas about the truth, God, or what is the proper piety or behavior, does not mean they have the concept of 'religion' in their mind. This only suggests that these people does not have the same attitude toward different parts of life. They could think about the other that they do something wrong, or have an incorrect understanding, but not in the sense that one group possesses a 'religious' quality and the other does not. The difference of the modern idea is that it tries to characterize a separated group of phenomena, called 'religion', which can be distinguished from the other aspects of culture and from a 'secular' world.

A definition of religion tries to explain the meaning of the word 'religion' or, we could say, it

18 Needham (1981) p. 73

19 The Islam is an exception, its whole structure is totally different. A word similar to 'religion' also can be found in the Koran.

20 Smith (1982) pp. 55-57

tries to find the meaning behind it. In most of the cases the research treats this word as it has a well known, unquestionable meaning that can be exposed. The job of the scholar seems to find this inherent meaning and express it. But the meaning of this word as we are using it today and the idea behind it is quite new, even though in the European tradition there is the word 'religion' in the older times. The meaning of 'religio' in the early Europe is different from the modern word 'religion'. Most of the times it was connected with meanings like piety or Christian truth. The different meanings of the word can make great confusion and misunderstanding if we try to understand an old text with the word 'religion' in the modern sense. When reading ancient texts we can 'read' a wrong meaning into the context. For example, take the 'religio' and understand it as something similar to the modern word 'piety', which is probably a good choice in many Christian writings[21]. One of the works of the Christian philosopher St. Augustine[22] called: 'De Vera Religione'. Most of the time it is translated as 'On the True Religion'. It is translated in a way, that is influenced by the modern commonly accepted point of view. But the meaning is probably different and it could be translated as: 'On True Religiousness' or 'On True Piety'. With the use of the word 'religion' and its modern meaning it has a totally different meaning. It can make a misunderstanding from the very beginning, forcing a modern concept on an ancient writing. Keep using the modern concept of the word can make the whole text interpreted in a modern way. This text does not suggests a world-view with religious-secular distinction, only shows what is the right way to be religious, by avoiding wrong religiousness.

Take an other example from a thousand years later. Huldrych Zwingli[23] wrote the 'De Vera et Falsa Religione', usually translated as "The True and False Religion". It suggests that this book talks about different religions, showing which is true or false. But the subject was not Christianity as the true religion in contrast to false religions, but rather the true or false 'piety' of Christians.

If we see John Calvin's[24] work the 'Institutio Christianae Religionis', which in English known as 'The Institutes of the Christian Religion'. This title, again, misleading as it can suggest that it realizes

21 Detailed explanation about the different meanings of 'religion' in Smith, W.C. (1991) pp. 19-50. Here we are going to follow his explanations.

22 Aurelius Augustinus Hipponensis (354 – 430), Bishop of Hippo Regius, was a Latin speaking philosopher. One of the most important figures in the development of Western Christianity.

23 (1484 – 1531) He was a leader of the Reformation in Switzerland.

24 John Calvin (1509 – 1564) was a French theologian and pastor during the Protestant Reformation. He broke from the Roman Catholic Church around 1530. He fled from France to Basel, Switzerland, where in 1536 he published the first edition of his seminal work Institutio Christianae Religionis.

Christianity as a religion. A literal, word for word translation of the title would read as 'An Instruction of Christian Piety' or 'The Foundations' or perhaps 'Structures of Christian Piety'. The Latin word 'institutio' can mean arrangement, custom, introduction, or education. The English word institute can mean elementary principle or a brief, intensive course of instruction devoted to technical fields. Perhaps a better rendering for this part of the title would be introduction or catechism. Calvin himself says in his prefatory address to King Francis: "My intention was only to furnish a kind of rudiments, by which those who feel some interest in religion might be trained to true godliness."[25] Here, again, the 'religion' is referring to something different then it would mean in the modern time. Both of the former mentioned writers are writing against the practices of the Catholic church, and presenting the right way of Christian religiousness as piety, the way of living, or even the right social order.

During the early times of the Christian world 'religion' meant the Christian truth. But this truth was not in opposition with other 'religious truths' but with falsity or error. To understand this concept we have to see every aspects of the society, regarding religiousness, as a coherent whole. There were no that kind of non-religious part of the life as we would describe today, and in fact there were no religion in the modern sense. It was only *life* that people lived according to the order of things. Everything that worked accordingly to the truth, the country, the king, politics, economics were all religious. Until the 19th century all the institutions were part of it. Non-religious was equal with the uncivilized, barbarous or pagan. The people of that time did not consider themselves as religious, even the word 'religion' rarely appeared in the texts. If they used it 'the religious' meant the monastics and the monastic order. And the secular was the name for the priests living outside of the monasteries, they were the *secular priests*.[26] There were no separation of church and state, the king was a kind of priest too, God's lieutenant on earth. He could even bless people, or command them to heal.

In order to understand better the point of view of that time, we can check ourselves, how do we relate to ideas as, for example, law or rights. The people of the modern time accept lots of laws as

25 Calvin [Online] http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=535&Itemid=27

26 Secular Clergy (Latin clerus sæcularis) In the language of religious, the world (sæculum) is opposed to the cloister; religious who follow a rule, especially those who have been ordained, form the regular clergy, while those who live in the world are called the secular clergy. - In The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved June 11, 2012 from New Advent: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13675a.htm

not only man made regulations but as universal truths. For example, the concepts that killing or stealing is not right, and it is right to punish who commits them. The ideas of equality, freedom, that people have free will or they are free to chose how they live. Or the formation of a family, the concept of monogamy. These ideas are all very natural for people and most of them would consider them as parts of life, parts of reality, not something that they just believe in or accept by faith. Actually there is no any rational basis to believe in these ideas instead of any other. Now if we consider these as merely one kind of narratives about how to live, we can understand that the people of the past have the same attitude toward their narratives. Adding a 'religious' element to their lives makes no sense, if we do not add the same quality to our lives. In this sense the phrase 'being religious' in the earlier times has the same meaning as 'being law-abiding' at the present.

That kind of abstract category which is similar to the modern concept, but still not the same, appeared during the time of enlightenment, used by the deists.

3. The Protestant Reformation

Starting from the 16th century with the Protestant Reformation, the structure of the European society started to change. Before this time most people were Roman-Catholic. During the years of reformation, the conflict between two groups separated the Christians of Western Europe to Protestants and Catholics. It was a separation in the unity of society, besides the attempt to reform the Roman Catholic Church.

It was started by priests who were against some of the teachings and practices of the Church, for example, against the sale of indulgences[27] and clerical offices and against many Catholic doctrines that were not found in the bible, even the authority of the Pope. Their intention was to get rid of the additional theories and practices that can not be found in the Bible, to reach a personal - for them 'original' - way of religious practice. The Reformation began on 31 October 1517, the day when Martin Luther, a German priest and professor of theology, nailed his statement, the *Ninety-Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*[28] to the door of the Castle Church, in Wittenberg. Soon other reformers followed his example, like John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, John

27 The indulgence is a remission of the temporal punishment due to sin. It is granted by the Catholic Church after the sinner has confessed and received absolution. Here it means the practice when this is sold for money.

28 Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum

Knox[29]. Although the new movement was quickly spreading through Europe, there were not complete agreement among their members. These differences in doctrines first caused divisions between them, later total separation. This lead to the establishment of different Protestant Churches: the Lutheran, the Reformed, the Puritans, and the Presbyterian. The events started here led to a series of violent actions and finally to the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648). The differences between the protestant groups has no significance for us now, what important is the new message and the active confrontation with the practices of the church. The new idea was a new way of thinking about the religious life, and about the meaning of right piety as it should be separated from the church.

The Reformation had a great impact on every sphere of life in Europe. It effected not only the role of the Church in the human life, but a new way of looking at the world and a new social structure were born. This implied the rethinking of several former truths about the society, and since the church was not separated from the state, this effected the economics and politics too. The formerly unified Christian Europe divided into two parts, and a new way of thinking about religion appeared: the idea of the religious life, as something that should be separated from many other aspects of human life. This was the starting idea that made possible the development of the modern idea of religion.

4. The Religious and the Secular

Dr. Timothy Fitzgerald dates the first appearance of the secular as a distinct field from the religious around the end of the 17th century[30]. It is connected with the activity of two persons: John Lock[31] and William Penn[32]. Both of them were English philosophers and were working on a separated, distinct category of politics and also on the private nature of religious life. This kind of separation of religious and secular appears the earliest time in their writings, but that time it still didn't have the same meaning as now. The purpose was the separation of the church from the state

29 John Knox (1514 - 1572) was a Scottish clergyman.

30 RRI 2008 (New Delhi). Record of the conference: Rethinking Religion in India. Organised by the Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap (Ghent University) and the Centre for the Study of Local Cultures (Kuvempu University, India). http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL92E6952D0AEC9D2A&feature=plcp

31 John Locke (1632 – 1704) was an English philosopher, an important thinker of the Enlightenment. Also known as the Father of Liberalism.

32 William Penn (1644 – 1718)

and to posit the religious life in a private sphere not in the hand of a group of people. Similar ideas were propagated by a group called 'The Religious Society of Friends' or Quakers. It is a Christian movement which started in England in the middle of the 17th century. Their teaching were spread by traveling preachers, and they were very critical about the whole religious life of that time. One of their purpose was to lead the people back to the practices of the early Church by transforming the religion to an inner, private quest, and pursuing a personal relationship with Christ[33]. To achieve this they separated themselves from the Church of England, and preached the need for a separate order which regulates the relations in society.

Since that time there were no difference between church and state, in modern words we could call it a political and also a religious movement. In 1650 the main figure of this movement, George Fox, was charged for blasphemy, and from 1662 the Quakers were officially persecuted in England[34]. The persecution stopped in 1689[35], but until this time many of the Quakers already escaped to America to be out of reach, and spread their teachings there. William Penn even made a "holly experiment" to run a state by the laws based on Quaker principles, the state of Pennsylvania.[36]

The Quakers clearly separated themselves from people with other beliefs. They thought the only right way of religious practice is through direct connection with Christ. They considered all other approaches as paganism, even the different views within the Christian traditions. In the 19th century there were intentions to establish a universal Church that would embrace all the different kinds of human religious traditions. James George Frazer, one of the founding fathers of the religious studies was a Quaker too.[37]

All these events made significant changes in the perception of the human life. But even if these movements often seems to us as religious, all their actions have an other side too. During that time lot of political and social power was concentrated in the hands of the Church. It was not possible for anybody to get a position in the Church, the positions were divided between themselves based on inner political interests and social background. The common people of that time, generally, did not

33 At least for them that was the original way.
34 The Quaker Act (1662) and the Conventicle Act (1664).
35 Because of the The Act of Toleration
36 Archdiocese of Philadelphia - Loughlin, J. (1911). In The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved June 11, 2012 from New Advent: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11793b.htm
37 Pals (1996) p.17

want to go against the will of the Church and accepted it as the source of truth. But there were other groups of power too, outside of the Church, such as the nobility and the richest traders. Since the places of influence was divided among these groups, one way to get higher share from the power was through the reduction of the Church's role. This interest increased in the colonial countries, since they were far away from the motherland, they could set up new power structures for themselves. To change social structure and make acceptable, especially for the common people, there was a need for a reasonable explanation. A new ideology, that would justify the separation of governance from the church came in handy. Later, by the official separation of church and state the world actually has been divided into two parts. This new division forced the people to rethink their categories about country, religion, duty, faith, etc.

These events and ideas had great importance in the shaping of the new ideas: the 'religion' and its counterpart the 'secular'. The former review of the historical events is not giving a complete and detailed description for the development of the new ideas. Its purpose is to introduce some important historical events, and make it clear that the distinction of the religious from the secular world is the result of a series of historical events, often dominated by struggle for power. The distinction is not based on a realization of a fundamental fact in the world, but from the opposition of different interests. A detailed analysis still requires further research.

5. The Natural Religion

During the time of the 18th century a new cultural movement of intellectuals emerged in Europe and America. Prior to the 17th century theism and deism referred to the same idea. Both terms meant that there is a supreme creator. The idea of deism started to diverge from theism with the expansion of the use of rationality and scientific inquiry.

The deists gave a new view about the world, the rule of God and the role of humanity in it. For them, although God created the universe and set it into motion, but only that was his role in it. God created the laws of nature, and set up the laws of morality, but He does not interfere and did not place power or authority in the hand of a group of people, the church. This idea was in accordance with the times intentions to separate the church from the state. There is a third thing that God did gave to the people, the chance for an afterlife, if they follow the moral laws.

Because of the special ideas of the deists, it was much easier to answer some questions that was difficult to answer for other Christians. One fundamental problem was for the Christians is to explain why there is no Christian religion in the other parts of the world. If God is almighty and all-loving, then it is difficult to explain that why God would leave millions and millions of people without hearing about Him, dooming them to eternal damnation. Since the deists did not rely on the church or revelation they could answer this easily. For them there is no need to meet with priests or read the bible to know God, everybody has equal chance for that. Among the deists there were two main kinds of explanations. The first is that every human beings have an innate, natural understanding of God. Without the need of any studies everybody has a perception of God, and understands that the world is created by Him. This is the faith of even the very first human beings, the 'natural religion' shared by the whole human race.

The other explanation of the deists was not based on an inner faith, but on observation. They claimed that anybody merely just observing the surrounding world will reach to the conclusion of God's existence. This explanation relies on the importance of reasoning. It characterizes God as a great architect who created a 'clockwork' universe, and the world in itself is the evidence for His existence. The Teleological or Design Argument is one of the oldest and most popular of the theistic proofs. It is easily understandable by everybody, so it is often used not only by theologists, but people of faith without deeper philosophical background. It suggests that there is an analogy between the order and regularity of the cosmos and the products made by human beings. We can see in the world everything has its right place, everything is working according to its function in a very complex system. The whole universe is similar to a perfect machine, where every part was designed perfectly to fit its place. Even the different parts of the body are functioning according to support the whole human being. If we see a machine, for example a watch, we know it is made by somebody. If we see the world we should get to the same conclusion. This kind of argumentation also can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophers, like Socrates and Plato, but the most known version is probably the watchmaker analogy associated with theologian William Paley[38], who presented it in his book, the Natural Theology in 1802.

The rational consequence of these ideas is that all the people around the world with their 'religious' manifestations are belong to the same natural religion, and all of them are inspired by

38 William Paley (1743–1805)

God in some way. Not only the teachings and rituals of he Christian world, but the teachings and rituals of the people in China, Africa, India etc. can be traced back to God. If an American Indian performs a ritual for the Great Spirit, or a Hindu offers fruits to Vishnu, they are motivated by the same principle: the inner realization of a transcendent power: God. Although this approach went against the dominant teachings of the Church, but it still did not offered total equality for every people in the world. The deists still thought that their understanding is deeper then the understanding of others, and only they see clearly the true nature of God. The non-European and non-American cultures were still treated inferior, and their religious practices too. Besides the right religiousness, the cultural and intellectual superiority of the west was also taken as evident.

In the teachings of the deists the basics concepts of the religious studies were formulated. This was the moment when the concept of general religion, and its several instances of religions were born. At the time of the 18th century there were common ideas among the intellectuals, they started to perceive the world as the place for religious beings. The idea of religiousness, even though got a broader sense, it was still based on the Judeo-Christian concepts. Actually, they pointed out directly that all the religions of the world are based on the religion of the deists, indirectly on the God of the European Christian tradition. All the descriptions they gave were based on the Christian idea of religion, although they formally has been separated from the Church, but they could not escape from the ideological structures of it, their framework of thinking remained similar.

And this was exactly the theoretical background of the religious studies. All the founding fathers of the religious studies were influenced by these ideas, or were deists themselves. They created the categories and methodology of the religious research based on Christian foundations. The religious studies is a product of this specific age and time, probably in an other culture it could not have happened the same way. In this sense we can say that the foundations of the religious studies are not excursively scientific, which is true to some of its methodologies only, but it is came from Christian Theology. Because the created categories, and the idea of religion itself, are resisting total revision, and there is a strong resistance to abandon even controversial ideas, it is also can be considered as dogmatic.

The rationality of that time, with the questioning of religious world views have an other effect too. From the evidence of the teachings of the church and the scriptures they shifted to the evidence found in nature. This approach favors scientific knowledge over any other kind, and since the non-

European cultures seemed not following the same narrative system, their descriptions were treated as primitive. Although the existence of God as the first cause of the universe and nature was accepted by lots of scholars, and they agreed that other cultures has this notion too, but they argued that those cultures had some rudimentary grasp on reality only. Their understanding is screened with superstition and misunderstanding. This kind of attitude, even if it is usually hidden, is still part of the modern narratives of this field.

6. The Impact of Colonization

Before there could be any serious attempt to clarify the categories used in the religious studies, there is an other problem to face: the culturally dependent nature of the research itself. The narrative that describes the world by the categories used in the religious studies is not a general, not a cross-cultural perception. It is a part of, and emerged from a specific socio-cultural medium – as we described it before -, so it is limited to that medium's ideological manifestations. The difficulty to realize this lies not only in the fact that if one belongs to a specific cultural medium then one would unintentionally follow the distinctive categories of that thought-system, but also in the accepted ideology's prevalent nature, viz. the so called 'western' way of thinking and lifestyle has been exported to the most part of the world. At least it is true, that it has been exported to those parts where this kind of studies were made, and the researchers all shared a similar narrative background. The created categories are maintained and recreated in the daily language, through the media, laws etc., and even in the academical world.

The origin of this kind of narrative on the one side is the English language, and indirectly the Latin, with its vocabulary and categories shaped by a Christian culture. On the other side is the political and cultural ideology based on the interests of the Euro-American colonial powers, and their effect on the social life, for example by the separation of church and state.

The unique situation of the English language as a general medium of communication in the world, and often in the scientific world, is evident, and the pervasiveness of the 'western' culture and ideologies too. To understand how did it came to this we have to go back in time, at least to the 16th century. The spreading of the 'western' culture can be traced back to the process of colonization. In the beginning this expansion was made by physical force, leaning on one country's superiority over

an other in technology, especially in warfare[39]. The process of colonization started with the forceful elimination of physical resistance, and with the establishment of alien rules in politics and social life. Then the conquered country has been "educated", usually by repressing the local culture. After long time of domination the categories that the conquerors were using to describe the conquered became the part of the narrative that has been used by the conquered too to describe themselves, even if these categories were non-existent before. In this re-education, the establishment of a new language - the language of the colonizing countries - as official language has a great importance. With the new language new words are used to describe the world, this also means a new categorization of the reality. This way new, formerly unknown concepts appeared and has been mixed with the original ideas. With time, by the education of the new generation, the local language became secondary, even almost forgotten. The "education" also forced new costumes, and value system on the locals, and the formerly important ones often has been degraded into the categories of superstition, or primitive habits.

In this paper by the word 'colonization' we refer manly to the colonial activities of the Western European countries from the 16th century until the very beginning of the 20th century. The countries of The Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, France and the Kingdom of England, from the 18th century Great Britain, all had important colonial roles during the history. There was a time when most part of the world was under colonial control: the Americas, Africa, Asia and Oceania too. At one time, Great Britain, for example, ruled almost fifty percent of the world.[40] The European empire have held around eighty-five percent of the world by the time of the First World War. This great number assures that the European ideas not only could be reached almost every part of the world, but had a great influence on them.

Although there were significant changes in the dominant thoughts of the colonial countries by the 19th century, and these changes amplified the tension between the colonial practice and the liberal thought, this effected only the material exploitation of the counties. The new liberal ideas wanted to lift up the colonized countries from a slave-like state, and wanted to give them more political freedom, but not in every aspect of life. At the same time most of the political philosophers were propagating the legitimacy of colonialism and imperialism in order to "educate" the

39 We would like to emphasize that this is not a superiority in knowledge or understanding of the world, nor in morality or any other human values.

40 Ferguson (2004) p.15

“uncivilized” societies. Behind the idea of equality the European values, languages, categories of thinking and political constructions were forced upon the colonized societies. All of these activities were formulated as a “civilizing mission” that meant to serve the best interests of the oppressed countries. The controlling power had to be maintained until a similar socio-political structure has been recreated and the newly formed society has been capable of sustaining similar kind of liberal institutions and self-government.[41] But even after the withdrawal of the formal colonial control, its effect on the culture could not be dismissed. The local people already organized themselves based on the ways of the oppressors. And the leading elite usually had been educated in foreign environment, often working for the former colonizing powers. We also have to emphasize that by the creation of a new political and social order, which has been manifested through a 'secular' state, a totally new perception of life emerged. The religious-secular distinction has been forced upon the people this way, letting them no choice for an alternative living of life. This situation destroyed their originally different understanding of life, where these categories were unknown.

From the 20th century, mainly after the Second World War, a new process, the neo-coloniazation took place with a new method of control. The main tool of power from the direct use of political and military force is changed into the propagation of global political, ideological and economical views usually by military, political and economical pressure from behind. At the same time the mainstream media and the education was still controlled on some level. For example, by the decision of what the correct interpretation of the history is and what the fundamental human values are. The withdrawal of the colonial powers might be experienced as a liberation by the formerly dominated societies, but the cultural effect of the long years of oppression remained already integrated into the society. This caused the maintenance and reproduction of the foreign ideologies by the local communities. Most of the locals accepted the new values and goals and because they are just started to construct the western kind of society, they immediately placed themselves in an inferior position. They needed further help from the west to create a western-like social, cultural, political and academical life.

By the spreading of the liberal capitalism and free market, the business interests are often become culture forming powers. Some of the cultural or religious days have been transformed in order to serve business interests. Usually it took form in the reshaping of an ancient or holy day, that people celebrate, by preserving some of its elements, but alter it in a way that will promote

41 Same kind of situation and similar rhetoric can be seen even recently, for example: the invasion of Iraq.

consuming different, usually that day's specific products. The original meaning of that day soon forgotten, only a simplified message remained, but actually not as the main center of that day, but only as a reason for consuming goods. One good example of this is the character of Santa Claus. The well known form that usually appears everywhere is the joyous, white-bearded man wearing a red coat and red trousers with white collar and cuffs, black leather belt and boots. This kind of characterization started to appear already in the 19th century in commercials, but this specific illustration was created by the Coca-Cola Company to propagate its product in the beginning of the 20th century. Today the main symbol of Christmas is this figure, even outside of the US. The many different illustrations in the European traditions slowly has been forgotten, and the stories behind it has been replaced by the artificial fairy-tale like stories. There were numerous traditions having some kind of celebration around the day 25th December, and stories about a person who later became Santa Clause. The origin of this character is a 4th century Greek saint Nikolaos of Myra. He was also called Nikolaos the Wonderworker or Saint Nicholas. He was the Bishop of Myra in Lycia. According to the stories, he was a good hearted man who often gave gifts to the poor, sometimes left money secretly at poor houses. If people left their shoes out for him for the night, he would put in some coins by the morning. In some countries on the 6th of December children clean their boots and put it at the window, in hope to get some gifts and sweets. In Hungary they are calling him the 'Winterfather' or 'Mikulas' which is a derivation of the name Nikolaos. Besides the strong effect of American culture during the last decades there were no Santa Claus in Hungary before. But there is still a gift giving habit at Christmas eve, although the gifts are not from Santa, but form the 'Baby Jesus'.

In America it is common to see 'Christmas Stockings' on Christmas Eve. These are empty socks or sock-shaped bags usually hanged close to the fireplace so Santa Claus can fill it up with gifts, small toys, candies or fruits. This custom originates from a very old story about Saint Nicholas. There was a poor man who had three daughters. Because he was very poor, he could not afford a proper dowry for them which would be a requirement to find a husband. Saint Nicholas wanted to help him, but without anybody else to discover it. There are many different versions of the story, but they are common in one thing: after two gracious offerings the poor man wanted to find out the identity of their benefactor. In one version, Saint Nicholas figures out that the man is waiting for him, so he drops the third bag of money down the chimney which falls into the stockings of the

daughter, who just washed them that day and hanged them there to dry.

The historical Saint Nicholas and his miraculous stories are still remembered and he is well respected among Catholic and Orthodox Christians. He is the patron saint of many professions and cities. Probably not many people are really aware of the connection between him and Santa Claus. Similar transformations can be seen in the 'marketization' of other religious, cultural days as the Halloween, Eastern or the Valentine's Day. These, mainly Christian days after a time changed to a kind of fun, consuming day. They have been imported as a product, a business model to many countries around the world. This kind of effects on culture sometimes called coca-colonization[42]. Of course, the numerous special days from the east, the Chinese, Indian or Muslim holidays not only never made it to the west, but never even heard of.

All these modern holidays are religious in their origin, but in their modern form only a few people celebrate it as a religious day, and almost nobody would consider the acts during these times, for example the decoration of the Christmas Tree, as a religious ritual. Why is it so? Why do we call customs with similar actions from non-western countries religious? And why would anybody think that these kind of habits in non-western countries are indicating something more, something more 'spiritual' than the western ones? These are questions that every student of the religious studies should ask.

The important in these processes for us is that it shows how the newly formed ideas and concepts, supported by oppression of former ideas or by advertising new ones, easily can change the people's relationship with their daily lives. The fundamental changes in a culture are not necessarily can be seen clearly, because even long existing concepts and ideas can disappear, and their former existence can be unknown for an outsider. The understanding of the importance of these events and their effect on human thinking will help to see the dependent nature of the categories used in the field of religious studies.

7. Post-Colonial Theory

The term post-colonialism, refers to not only one, but a set of theoretical approaches in different cultural studies, history, literature and political theory. The common aspect in them is the intention

42 Wagnleitne (1994)

to reveal the effects of colonization, primarily on the culture of the colonized but in some cases also on the colonial countries. In our research it is important to reflect on its effect on the academical studies, as the definition of knowledge is based on European concept.

The post-colonial studies started during the middle of the 20th century after the independence of the colonized countries. In the beginning it appeared only in the post-colonial countries, but later the ideas expanded to other countries too. Edward Said's and his book Orientalism (1978) has an important role in this. In his book he described the Middle East using Michel Foucault's technique of discourse analysis. He criticize the Western representations of the Eastern culture and pointed out the relation between knowledge and power. Said was of Palestinian origin, and a University Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, New York. His great discovery was that in the western representations of the eastern countries, he himself, and the eastern people generally can not recognize themselves. The reason of this is that the orientalist scholarship is neither objective, nor independent. It is based on the ideologies of the imperialist societies that produced it, hence their research is interwoven not only with social, but political ideology too. In this sense the categories and descriptions created by the orientalist scholarship are servile to power.

Connected to the post-colonial theory we have to mention another important process: the intellectual decolonization. It means the process of deconstruction of the patterns in thinking, behavior and the formulations in the society that has been created by the colonizing powers. The post-colonialism, as an intellectual and critical movement, appeared in a wide range of disciplines. Here we are interested only in those aspects that can facilitate the understanding of the spreading of the religious-secular distinction, and of its maintenance. The deconstruction of the categories used in the religious studies belongs to the decolonization process of the post-colonial theory.

8. The Study of Religion

Now, we are going to give a short introduction about the field of religious studies. The religious studies is a modern science, it was created out by a blend of disciplines, using their methodologies and results. These disciplines are, for example, the anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, history of religion etc. In the beginning they called it 'the science of religion'. It was invented by a

German philologist Friedrich Max Müller[43]. He was a professor at Oxford University and he was well known from his writings on language and mythology. His main field of research was Hinduism and the ancient Indian texts. He was the first person, who got an official title about religious studies, he was the first 'Professor of Comparative Religion'. This kind of major did not exist before, the position was created especially for him. In his book the 'Introduction to the Science of Religion' (1873) he creates the theory and methodology of the comparative study of the religions.

In order to understand why this was the time for the creation of this discipline we have to remember the important historical and ideological events that preceded it. We covered them on the former pages, from the beginning with the idea of the separation of church and state until the natural religion of the deists. Müller inherited this perspective and he used it to describe the 'religious' phenomena.

The method of comparing different customs and finding similarities has a great importance in his book, and it has influenced the later studies of scholars in this field. Researches with similar kind of intentions and methodology spread more and more and by the second half of the 20th century the study of religion had emerged as a prominent and important field of academical research. Beside the Christian religions, the other religions also got more and more attention. By the 1960s and 1970s, the term "religious studies" became widely known and the academical interest about the field increased. New departments were founded, more and more books were published, and journals focusing on religious studies were initiated. Before the 1960s there were such fields as 'the comparative study of religion', the 'history of religion', the 'sociology of religion' but later the term 'religious studies' become common.

The numerous subcategories of the religious studies are focusing on different fields connected with religion. For example the philosophy of religion uses philosophical tools to evaluate religious claims and doctrines. There is some amount of overlap between subcategories of religious studies and the discipline itself. Religious studies seeks to study religious phenomena as a whole, rather than be limited to the approaches of its subcategories. But the origin of the general picture of the world, with existing religions and the view of the duality of the religious and secular world, usually is not an object of its research.

43 Pals (1996) p. 3

9. Defining Religion

It is a common way to start an introduction of a topic by the definition of its subject. This definition will give a general picture about the subject and it will help the reader to understand what he has to deal with. But the definition has another important function too, not only for the reader but for the writer or researcher: to show his point of view about the topic, by revealing which kind of phenomena contribute to the research and which kind leads off topic. In the field of religious studies most of the authors first try to define the meaning of religion, and than based on this definition they would describe all the phenomena that corresponds to it. But in the case of religious studies this first step is still without much success: the given definitions are not satisfying and not generally accepted.

We could ask the questions: why is the definition that important? Is not the phenomena of religion so evident that we could skip the definition and just get in to the middle of research? I think most of the people thinks that, even without definition, the phenomena of religion can be clearly understood. Moreover they would think the definition only makes it confusing. And this is exactly why it becomes problematic: the 'religion' seems a concrete, evident concept, but if we try to define it, try to understand its essence, then we realize that there is no any concrete reason to explain why do we call something a religion. It is evident that in the daily life usually everybody is able to use the word 'religion' with high certainty, and seemingly without any confusion in the discourse. But we would like to emphasize that even if a word has a well-known place in the common social life, that does not makes the word more then an useful tool in communication. And it certainly will not make that word a bearer of a meaning which refers to concrete phenomena in the world, consequently it not necessarily can be the object of scientific research in the world only in the language.

The claim for a correct definition is important, if the religious studies wishes to be treated as a scientific method. The mathematics, as the basic example of the scientific ways, is excellent about definitions. We can imagine what would happen with the reputation or seriousness of the mathematics if the definitions of its objects would not be exact, but mere thereabouts. And the precise definition is a requirement in every field of science, not only in the mathematics.

In our opinion the need for a correct definition is quite sound, because by the absence of the

exact definition of the research's object a misunderstanding can be created. This is not only a misunderstanding appears for the reader, but it can represent the author's too. Even it would seem that there is some real communication, but how does the author and the reader understands the topic is not necessarily the same. Concerning the difference between a word's daily and scientific usage this problem can lead to the mixing up of different phenomena and unite them under one word. Or in the other case, similar concepts can be separated merely by the discriminating habit of daily thinking or language, and their similar qualities are overlooked.

The question is that whether the phenomena is 'religious' in itself because it has certain qualities or it became 'religious' because our thinking endows it with that attribute. In the first case there must be a distinctive quality or qualities that belong only and only to the so called 'religious' phenomena, and any exceptions has to be removed from this category irrespectively of the habitual categorization of the given phenomena. The same process should be applied for the phenomena that are not called 'religious' in the daily language but fits in the category described by the definition. If this selection does not happen that would be the violation of the logical coherence and the querying of the scientific credibility of the given methodology. Still we can see numerous times that academics ignoring this very important and basic logical and scientific rule.

Moreover the definition itself has to give a clear explanation of the phenomena without leaning on any presuppositions and what is more it can not contain any element that can be understand only in the light of the definition. In other words: in order to avoid circular argumentation the definition of religion can not rely on words that can only be understood or defined by the word 'religion'. For example, if the presence of the 'sacred' is the central point to define religion[44], and the meaning of the 'sacred' can only be understood through the concept of religion, then it is a circular definition.

Generally there are two main ways to define religion: to define by substance or by function. We can call these substantial and functional definitions. The first one tries to grab some essential characteristics of the religions, showing what religion is. The second focuses on what religion does, it tries to describe those processes that are working functions in all religions. To give examples: the concept of the absolute or the supernatural, as basic characteristic of the religions, are typical examples of the substantial definition. The functional definition would find the common part of the religions, for example in a social characteristic, like uniting people, or its effect on individuals as

44 Like the definition of Émile Durkheim.

comforting them.

Every definition of religion would use one or both of these ways. There are numerous definitions, but none of them is generally accepted. Probably every significant scholar has his own. Not only there is no generally accepted definition, but sometimes the differences are so wide that they can exclude each other. Nevertheless there is one common element that all of them silently agree with: the division of the humanity to religious and no-religious individuals, and religious and non religious activities, ideas etc. The logical consequence of this division is that the definition of religion and the descriptions of religious people can not be the same with the descriptions of the non-religious. If there is an overlap or similarity between these two, then not only the definition is problematic, but the division of the object of definition itself can be questionable.

The problematic nature of the definitions is always present. If we take a functional definition, we should find a social function that is only peculiar of the religious phenomena, but in our opinion, there is no such a function. All the functions described in the definitions - after they are striped of their own ideological point of view - can be found in every society, on every level of it manifesting by different forms.

There is an other way to describe religion based on Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of Family resemblance.[45] It is a philosophical idea that states that a category can contain elements not necessarily connected by one essential common feature. Among these elements one may connect with an other by similar characteristics, but not with every element. These actual connections between some elements will form an overall connection between the whole by a series of overlapping similarities. Using this kind of description of religion there is no need to find one common feature.

But this kind of description, even though it really talks about what we call 'religion', has two serious problems. First, it does not say anything about why we call something 'religion' and what religion is. But that would be the main goal of a definition, so in this sense it is not a definition. Second, this description will not eliminate the problem that arises from the separation of the religious from secular. If we start to examine how different phenomena resemble each other by sharing some similar elements we will still exclude some others, even they are also having similarities, only because they are not called 'religious'. Among the group of religious phenomena

45 Wittgenstein (1953)

there are elements that does not resemble each other directly, only they are connected through resemblances with other elements. If we would really use the theory of family resemblances to observe the resemblances between different phenomena, probably we could make more connections and cover every human activities in the world. The problem lies in the situation that even before the description, we already have an idea about religion, so we include only those elements that will fit our presupposition. We will not connect elements that would still fit the criteria of family resemblance if they are not included in our presupposed idea of religion. In the light of the narrative theory the whole system of family resemblance can be examined from a different point of view. The narrative theory treats every descriptions as a creative process. Driven by the plot, there is a selection of elements, from the unlimited possibilities, and they appear as connected to each other according to the story, a synthesis of heterogeneous elements. This means that there are no 'resembling' phenomena in themselves, they are created through the description. According to this there can be numerous different narratives creating different family resemblances, but before the narrative there were no any resemblance in itself. The narrative theory will be explained in Chapter IV.

An other possibility would be to name all the phenomena that is considered as religious, and by making a list, defining religion. It would contain all the specific activities, ideas and customs described in a very specific way referring to their location too. It would be necessary to be specific otherwise we could associate to the similar non-religious phenomena too. But in this case it would be only an enumeration of different phenomena and there would be no any reasonable explanation why it is forming a category, besides the habit of convention. And this would not be a definition and not a basis for research, we could make any kinds of enumerations and start a new discipline of study. But this would not mean that there is an objective, separable phenomena, only that there is discriminative habit without necessary solid base out of itself.

There is an other problem the researcher has to face: there is no objective way to proclaim any kind of thinking or belief about the nature of the world as superior, or at least, it should not be the duty of the religious studies to do so. For example, the belief that God created the universe and the belief the the Big Bang created it should be treated on the same level. Worshiping a guru or a pop star in front of a private altar also should be the same. If with the definition we can not get any reliable answer we should consider to review and think over our concepts and ideas about the

phenomena of religion.

The faulty in the definition can be examined in a twofold way: on the one side the definitions never can cover the whole field of phenomena that the 'religion' is supposed to nominate. On the other side the definitions are also giving descriptions of numerous non-religious phenomena. If we can get rid of the habitual separation of these two and examine the definitions in this way, we will realize its illusory nature. The definitions are not discoveries of hidden essences and descriptions of a group of phenomena, but creative processes: arbitrary selection and descriptions of the researchers own categories, effected by his own environment.

For example, Émile Durkheim writes in his book, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life:

"A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, i.e., things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite in one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them."[46]

Durkheim always tries to avoid any references to the concept of the 'supernatural', because he thought it is a relatively new idea, appeared as an opposition to the idea of natural, through the descriptions of the sciences. With this we totally agree. He focused on the idea of the 'sacred' as the core of every religions. He defined sacred things as:

"...simply collective ideals that have fixed themselves on material objects... they are only collective forces hypostasized, that is to say, moral forces; they are made up of the ideas and sentiments awakened in us by the spectacle of society, and not of sensations coming from the physical world."[47]

The idea of sacred brings out its opposite the profane, these are parallels with the religious-secular distinctions. The problem with the idea of the sacred is that it does not really bears more information than 'something important'. The feeling that the 'religious' people concerning some ideas and rituals performing something sacred, which is different from the other very important activities in their lives is probably the product of the researcher's imagination. There are accentuated days, ideas and objects in everybody's life. Within a community these are shared interests. But these are parts of their daily lives. It seems that the word 'sacred' is just a substitute for the word 'supernatural', that the definition tried to avoid. Most of the societies have no words for these categories of the sacred or profane, it is the product of European religious thought. The experience

46 Allan (2005) p. 115.
47 Lukes (1985) p. 25.

with sacred things describes the world of the observer. Moreover, even in the secular life there are things can be called sacred, for example, the family, the country, the national flag, certain objects or places that are not allowed for others, or even someones personal sphere. Commonly shared important ideas, moral values and symbolic object can be found in every community, these are the factors that make a community.

To illuminate the situation why is it so difficult to get rid of a category that seems does not have a concrete meaning, lets examine another, but closely connected topic: the concept of ideology and later the narrative theory. Through this we can get a better understanding about the nature of human thinking and the results of the reasoning we will use in our topic by setting a parallel between these fields of studies.

Chapter III: Ideology

1. Scientific Language and Common Language

Every discipline of science have its own language, its own vocabulary to describe its subject. Usually, this language is based on a natural language and - depending on how abstract the given topic is - it can be quite similar with the ordinary language or totally different from it.

For example, the language used in linguistics or anthropology is more understandable than the language used in mathematics, especial mathematical logic, or a programming language. Generally we can say that the languages of the social sciences are closer to the general language then the languages of the natural sciences. The social sciences are usually describing processes that can be easily observed in the daily life too, the difference is that the scientific research requires a deeper and wide-ranged perspective. The research can expose different relationships between events and object to an extent, when it is already not part of our normal understanding of the world at all. As the object of description gets far away from the common situations of daily life, it will be more abstract. This new information can seem to be irrelevant or even non-comprehensible to people not experts of the given subject. But even if the language is very abstract, it is still a language in the sense that it is communicating something, it can contain information. We can say that, with language the speaker is encoding the information and the receiver is decoding it. The language becomes the holder of information, but only in relation with a person, because only a person is capable of understanding. The understanding belongs to the human nature, so the quality of meaning is a part of it too. The language as an 'information container' makes sense only if there is someone who is capable to 'decode' it.

In a general scientific description we will meet at least some technical terms. Without understanding the meaning of these technical terms the real message of the description is unintelligible, or an incorrect understanding of the terms will lead to misunderstanding. The danger of misinterpretation is much more severe when the language used in the scientific research is very similar to the language used in the daily life, and some of the technical terms are not exclusively used in that given field. To avoid this situation the need for the precise definition of the basic terms

arise. A common word gets its own position in a created language through the process of definition by stating what meaning or which qualities are rendered to the word in this special use of language. The word's new meaning can remain close to or it can diverge from the meaning in the ordinary language.

For example the the word 'idealist' in a philosophical discourse means a person who accepts any system of philosophical idealism, but in a daily situation it usually names a person who was influenced by noble ideas or it often means unpractical, romantic or visionary attitude. Furthermore the word 'idealism' has different meanings in art, Christian eschatology or in the American study of international relations etc. Merely by having an assertion, like “he is an idealist”, without the understanding of the context or language system where it has been used, there is no hope for correct understanding.

Or the word 'degradation' in the daily use of language means degeneration, moral or intellectual decadence. But it means erosion in physical geography, chemical decomposition in chemistry and a person's ritual dismissal from a military or church position in sociology[48] etc.

The necessity to separate the created language from the daily language comes from the difference between the world we are facing in the daily life and the world we are facing during the scientific research. By facing a world we mean grasping a world through language. The language and narrative used to describe the situation will effect the perception of the reality of that moment. The difference is not merely linguistic: besides the different ideas in the two systems, there are differences between the inner relations of the ideas in a given system and in the goals the system is used for.

We would like to emphasize that the difference is not only during the narrative's manifestation in spoken language but during the process of understanding. The description of an experience is effected by the language, we can express something as far as the language let us to express. If there are no proper words for a description then it is impossible to express the meaning. But besides of the descriptive process of the language there is a creative process too. First it appears during the perception when the sensation becomes intelligible based on linguistic categories. The world will be perceived as it is recreated in language, based on the words and structure of the language and on the given narrative. Because there are many different languages, and there are many possible kind of

48 Degradation Ceremony. Harold Garfinkel: 'Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies' in *American Journal of Sociology*; 1956

narratives in one language, the world that one describes, or the world one lives in, is already one specific version of the numerous possible worlds. We refer to the 'world' as a *lived world* that manifests itself with all its components: the self, the physical world, feelings, goals, future and past etc., and treat every kind of explanation of it as a separate narrative.

The worlds described by different narratives are not necessarily corresponding with each other. The words and categories are always rendered to some specific kind of human action. The discriminative categories that are useful to understand a common situation (for example shopping) are not useful in physics, mathematics or literature and vice versa. The reason of this lies in the difference of the intention or the goal one has in that situation. To get the desired result in these activities we don't need categories of the other, we can say: in these activities the categories of the other are non-comprehensible or even non-existent. What use can have of the derivation, syllogism or the relativism in the success of cooking or to travel from our home to our workplace? It is evident that focusing on a daily activity does not require any other interpretation of its corresponding objects beyond their level of usability for the given task. In this sense the world is manifesting during these activities are nor more illustrious, nor less true than any other. Even a scientific description can not claim to hold higher truth value because in this sense only those descriptions have significances that correspond with the goal of the activity. Therefore, a scientific description can be right only in a scientific research, but there are numerous other kind of human activities which are all irrelevant to scientific descriptions. On the other hand, the scientific research in its own field has to use the corresponding scientific language and scientific categories, irrespectively how different it is from the daily descriptions.

For example, to drive our car from one place to an other, distant place we do not need any sophisticated understanding of ourselves, the car's function or the world. We simply need the ability to drive car, the knowledge about the rules of the road and directions. If we have all these we can reach the destination. Our categories of thinking and description of reality has nothing to do with the success of accomplishing our task, as far as we have the former mentioned abilities. We could collect much more detailed information about this activity, the car or the surrounding world. We could examine our ability to drive with the methods of biology or psychology, we could analyze the car and its ability to run by the laws of physics, mechanics or chemistry. We could describe the surrounding world by the ways of geology, meteorology and physics. And finally we could examine

the situation in regard of the categories of philosophy or metaphysics to check if there is any movement at all or the whole driving happens in the mind only or by a special correspondence of mind and matter. There is a possible point of view and a corresponding category system for each of these descriptions. And they are giving a more detailed description of their topic then the description of one's while focusing on the driving. The difference is that the person's goal or intention is different. In the first case the goal is to arrive to a place, there is no need to observe the situation in any other way. The description - or in other words the narrative - of the situation in this case is sufficient and all the other elements are irrelevant no matter of their truthfulness. And if we describe truthfulness in relation with a given goal then every other descriptions without a corresponding goal will not reach any truth value.

The importance of this introduction is, besides to understand the unlimited number of possible narratives, to realize the difference between two fundamentally different kind of activities and their various descriptions, viz. the daily life and the scientific research. Regarding to this, on the one hand I do not deny the right to use the category 'religion' and the religious-secular distinction or their role in the daily language. It has been interwoven with the common language and the common experience of life, even though it belongs to the vocabulary of a specific socio-cultural medium. But, on the other hand I will give arguments against its usefulness to keep using it in the academical world, at least in a similar way as in the common language. I will point out the word's inconsistent nature as an objectively recognizable category, and its culture related existence, therefore it should be treated critically in the scientific world.

Moreover, even I hold that the traditional way of categorization in religious studies could be totally deconstructed, and it is possible to create a new scientific language, but I doubt that the widespread use of the language and categories in daily life are easily alterable. Hence an actual change in the scientific language would distantiate it from the common language. This separation of the two kind of languages and the tension between them can make reluctance even within the field of scientific research.

Those fields of scientific researches that has a long history and had time to elaborate their categories, already separated their terms from the daily descriptions. In a new field, like the religious studies and some other social sciences, this kind of separation and precise definition of every category has not been made yet, as it appears in the religious-secular distinction.

2. Ideology

In order to understand the problematic nature of a description that separates the religious phenomena from the secular we have to examine the nature of the human understanding. By examining it we will get an insight about the position of the researcher himself. Through this understanding we will know which conditions are effecting the ways of experiencing and describing the phenomena. For the explanation we will use two important concepts: the 'ideology' and the 'narrative'. In this chapter we will focus on the ideology. Understanding the meaning of ideology has two benefit for us in the religious studies. The first is that every complex set of ideas in every cultures are formulating an ideology that can be characterized by the same standards. In this sense it is not possible to find difference between religious and non-religious ideologies. The second is that through the understanding of the effect of the ideologies on a person, we can know that within the framework of certain ideologies it is impossible to make a self reflection, and it is possible to maintain irrational statements and judgments. This is true even for scientific ideologies.

The general descriptions of ideology has a lot to do with the descriptions of religion. Lots of people consider religion as a kind of ideology in itself. Deeply influenced by Marxism, there is a pejorative reading of the word 'ideology' referring only to some social classes, especially to the ruling classes. The word itself has a short history and originally it was used as the 'science of ideas' by Destutt de Tracy[49]. In less then fifty years its meaning changed to the pejorative sense[50]. The word has a wide range of use, therefore we have to specify in what sense we are using it in this paper.

What we are more interested in is the description of the general characteristics of ideologies and, after comparison, the recognition of the field of religious studies as one of them. We will use the word in a wider sense here, based on the ideas of Ricoeur, the *ideology* as the basic and general character of the human thinking. In this sense there is no any non-ideological position, as it is stands for the framework of the system of thinking. Its active side, as a descriptive function based on the conceptual framework of ideology, is the *narrative*. The narrative too, we are going to use it in a

49 Antoine Louis Claude Destutt, comte de Tracy (1754 – 1836) was a French Enlightenment philosopher.
50 Kennedy (1979) pp. 353-368

much wider sense than in the daily language. We use it to describe all human activities of understanding, interpretation and description. The narrative is the expressive function of the ideology, but not only expressive toward others but toward the self as well: during the process of understanding through the selection of some data by organizing them.

The difficulty is that the ideology of oneself, is being the frame of the thinking, can hardly be reflected on, the interpretative character of the narrative does not let it to manifest. It is only possible by a dramatical shift in the point of view that gives place to a new frame of thinking. This would require a significant change in the former point of view, giving chance to a self reflection. We have to mention that being outside of a given ideology does not mean an objective point of observation, but to be placed in an other framework of ideology, that merely gives us an other way of thinking, but in no way an interpretation-free or ideology-free standpoint. This concept has an accented importance when we examine the point of view that emphasizes a clear separation between the 'religious' and 'secular' world.

The understanding of other cultures' customs always happens in the light of one's own culture. This position is not objective, it is not a standpoint that is freed from prejudice, but deeply interwoven with one's own categories of thinking and language. Thus the explanation of an object could be completely different for one who is inside of the given culture from one who is outside of it. And the insider-outsider separation does not mean a position of subjective-objective standpoints, because there is no one global outsider standing point. The very moment when we are started to form some ideas we are already placed inside an ideology. Moreover there are numerous different descriptions within the 'insiders' and this prevents them to form a homogeneous medium. A description that characterizes a religion, culture or country in a circumscribed way is a mere generalization.

The person who makes the research or the observation is effected not only by one factor, but by many: the education, social class, interest, country, personal attitude, language etc. Thus the narrative will always express the view from a position of a particular social-historical point. The elements of the narrative are always depend on this subjective situation and this could cause significant differences in different narratives, some categories would be existent for one and non-existent for the other. We can see this, for example, in different languages, where the vocabulary shows a different division of experience. In our case the modern meaning of the word 'religion' that

came out from a specific culture and language, it does not necessarily has an equivalent in other languages.

3. The Nature of Ideology

The history of the word 'ideology' is not long, it was created by the French thinker Claude Destutt de Tracy at the turn of the nineteenth century, to name one of the aspects of his study on the 'science of ideas'. It was a study related to biology (called zoology at that time), he examined the four faculties of the conscious life: perception, memory, judgment and volition. Later on this word became widely used, but in almost every cases it took a – more or less – negative sense. It represents a way of thinking that is false, gives way to justifying false ideas and leads to a distorted point of view. It is also often connected with the dominator function of a privileged group. This kind of negative description can be found in Marx's writings. He had absolutely negative concept about ideology, and for him the religion itself is the very example of ideology.

We would like to take the concept of ideology in a wider sense, approaching it from a different perspective to finally get to a quite different point of view. We are going to follow the idea of Paul Ricoeur[51] to get over the traditional concept of ideology - that based on former concepts with a narrow, limited range of interpretation - thus being able to cover all the varieties of thinking ways. Besides the basic ideas of Ricoeur, this paper uses the concept of ideology in a different way, connected to the idea of religion. Ricoeur did not use his argumentation in this context.

There are two parts of the ideology that we can examine: its content and its function. We are going to continue with the examination of the concept of ideology, focusing on the function of ideology rather than on its content. In order to really understand the meanings and functions of the ideologies, at first we have to know how to separate these two: the actual ideological content (collection of ideas and beliefs) and the general features of ideologies, which are general characteristics. By focusing only on the diversity of the ideological contents we can group or separate different ideas, but the reflection on these ideas always will be from a specific ideological standpoint. The general characteristics of ideologies are the necessary functions of every human, it

51 Science and Ideology (Chapter 12.) in Ricoeur (1991) pp 246-269

means the qualities and processes that every human possesses during the cognitive process of understanding the world, and the grouping of ideas. In the religious-secular distinction the separation is made by the content. This means that a belief is called religious not because of the presence of the belief itself, but because of its content. For example, if we take two people, both of them are believing in something, different things but in a similar way, and that makes them to do certain actions, depending on the objects of their believes one will be called religious and the other is not[52].

For Marx the most common and apparent conception of the ideological phenomenon is the reality's dissimulation which takes into account the opposition between ideology (ideal plan) and praxis (real plan). It emphasizes the difference between the real and the illusory, suggesting that every ideological situation is untrue, and it can be observed from a true, objective, non-ideological standpoint. This standpoint will be, according to Althusser, for example, the scientific approach which will make a direct opposition between the science and ideology. But we can take an other way, following Ricoeur's approach, to show there is no such scientific neutral place to discuss the concept of ideology. All of us are effected by our past, the way we grow up, and the environment we live in. These effects shaped our thinking way to a certain form; we can not get out of this situation. One important point is: the ideology is operative, not thematic.[53] It operates 'behind our back', shapes our thinking way and not appearing for us as a concrete concept. We live and think in it, so we can not reflect on it from outside. This natural web of concepts and habits constructs every persons own ideology.

This idea suggests that all point of views, and the knowledges on reality, are clearly affected by some kind of ideology, therefore we are not even able to separate science from ideology. The scientific point of view is a kind of ideology too. Marx, during his analysis on ideology, forgot to examine his own concepts and understand them as part of an ideology. This kind of thinking divides the world into two regions: the region of 'my thinking' and the region of all the others, and takes the 'my thinking' as objective. This kind of approach does not fulfill the criteria for a scientific research, and especially in social and cultural studies this point should be considered seriously.

52 Like in the case of believing in the universal law of dharma or the universal law of human rights.
53 Ricoeur (1991) p. 251

4. Ideology and Religion

Now, we would like to use this basic idea in the research on religion. The parallel between the two situations and the problem behind them is this: trying to define and observe a phenomena based on some of its attributes and qualities, but forgetting about the basic situation of the observer who is endowed with similar attributes. For example, observing beliefs and rituals and describing them as some kind of special human attributes belonging to the category of religion, but at the same time one forgets about one's own beliefs and rituals.

When someone is observing a supposed religious phenomena, the understanding of that phenomena is transferred through the observer's own interpretation. The selecting, organizing and interpreting function of his thinking does not appear as an object, therefore it can not be noticed. Being in a situation like this, the observer is not able to carry out an objective inquiry, but posing in it. In other words: the observer also has a belief system - even faith -, habits that are not rational but parts of a group's culture. For example, if one is to define the essence of religion by 'faith', that would imply that there must be people without faith, the non-religious. But the traditional distinction of believer and non-believer, or man of faith and faithless belongs to the traditional Christian thinking, so the used distinction itself originates from a, so called, system of belief.

According to a description given in a wider perception of ideologies, these two kind of people can not be divided into separate groups by the presence or absence of faith, because both of them have a system of belief. They can be separated only by the content of their belief. The problem with this is that the reality of the content is not the topic of the religious studies, so the categorization will be not different from any other, subjective discrimination, like the religious-pagan distinction of the traditional Christianity for instance. Both in appearance and in function the religious-pagan and secular-religious distinctions are similar. In both cases the first stands for a 'natural' or objective point of view that can distantiate itself from the other. Even if a 'secular' view does not want to criticize any 'religious' views, but it still holds that its methodology is suitable to describe the other, but it is not true for the methodology of the religious. In what objective sense can we place, for example, the distinction of secular-religious over the religious-pagan? Why would it describe the world much better? Both of these explanations are serving a goal hidden inside their narratives, based on the framework of their own ideologies.

Our intention is to find a way that takes account of this original position of the observer and to build a way of research on it without neglecting its ideological nature. We think the best way to achieve this is to focus on the general features of ideological systems instead of their content.

Based on the theory of ideologies now we are going to examine what are the basic characteristics of the religious studies. The goal of the religious studies is to study the human religious behavior and belief from somewhere other then any particular religious viewpoint. This is where the difference should be between it and the theology or many eastern philosophical traditions. The intention of this kind of research is to represent a third party perspective. But what does this 'third party perspective' mean? According to the religious studies it would mean that this point of view lacks the beliefs not only of the given religion being observed, but all the religions. This assertion has two hidden presumptions. First: the religious point of view is incorrect, because being away from it makes the point of view capable of objective understanding, which means true understanding. Second: the point of view of the scholar is correct and objective with the ability to observe and understand the other. This means it represents a higher understanding. This kind of point of view pervades the study of religion but usually remains unexpressed.

An other difference between the scholar of religious studies and the theologian would be that the former needs not to be a believer, and no belief should effect the research. Theology stands in contrast to the philosophy of religion and religious studies generally in the sense that the theologian is first and foremost a believer, employing not only logic but scripture as evidence. With this distinction we face a similar kind of problem that was mentioned before. To accept this we have to show that there is a special position in research that lacks any beliefs. That is impossible, we can not ignore the belief system of the scholar, and those texts he accepts as authentic. As we explained it in the former part of this paper, there are certain believes that made the religious studies possible (for example, some concepts from deism). And if we see the situation in the academia of the recent times, it already has numerous books and well developed concepts that are treated authentic in this field. If the scholar of the religious studies is also depend on belief and books of authority, then already the difference between him and the theologian seems not so evident. Moreover the scientific research methodologies can be used by theologians too. Although it was not popular approach in the

past, but it is getting more common among Christian apologist recently[54].

In the modern use of language we can see this tendency that divide people into two categories. If it is examined more critically, the only difference between them, that the belief based on the information given by scientists we call knowledge, and the texts are called scientific works. But in both cases the attitude toward their own beliefs is similar.

5. Concepts About Religion

First we have to summarize what the general view of religion is and how people use it. In speaking and thinking about religions there are several kind of preconceptions, which are formed by the culture, education, language and the whole environment in which the person has grown up.

The understanding of the religious phenomena does not start from an objective point of view. It is not just there in the world for everyone to recognize it. When someone starts to think or study about religion, he already affected by preconceived ideas shaped him during his life. The religious life is seen through this intellectual spectacles. Our thinking is not only a tool that helps us to react to the information we get, but it determines the ways of perceiving it. We are profoundly affected by the concepts that makes us to select, group, and organize the multiplicity of events, assisting us to discern in them a coherent meaning which our language can express. The moment when one tries to define the religion, a complex idea about it is already there, which did not come from research. The idea of religion is a habitual distinction in the daily life and the notion of it is not based on scientific research. The conventional way that we use to describe human religious life does not represent the only, or the most fruitful way of perceiving this area of reality. The standard way of thought and perception creates a lot of problems not only describing the whole body of religious activities but even to define the religion itself, which would be the object of research and the starting point.

What are those point of views that should been reconsidered? Those concepts that makes us describe the cultures of the world that they posses a clearly distinctive characteristic, the 'religion'. To see this 'religion' as divided into a number of theological and historical complexes, separated

54 A good example is Dr. William Lane Craig. He is an American philosophical theologian, and Christian apologist. He is using he most recent scientific results, usually from physics, to prove the existence of God. Some of his important books: The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz (1980), Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology (with Quentin Smith, 1993), Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics (3d edition, 2008).

from each other with their own distinct features forming 'religions'. These separated entities are the Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Shintoism, Taoism, and so on. The usual reference to these entities are made with a separation of them from other human activities like politics and science. Also separated from other concepts like state, civil society etc. that creates an other sphere of life, the 'secular'. The descriptions treat them as entities that can interact with each other, and usually the 'religious' connects with the 'secular' only in an inconvenient way. For example, people like to separate the 'religion' from 'politics', as these are exclusive categories, and any mixture of them could be happen in a kind of negative way.

The understanding of the 'religious' is always contains a duality. It can be described and understood only as opposing with something else, something non-religious. In language it appears in dichotomies like natural-supernatural, reason-belief, etc. These concepts are always referring to each other and the use of them maintains the appearance of a meaningful discourse. But because these dichotomies are parts of a presupposition, they are actually defining each other in this context.

Usually people has no doubt about their concepts when they are perceiving the religious world this way. But this kind of perception, as we described before, is not an old or well founded point of view, but a modern invention. Seeing the world this way has some inevitable consequences. First, it seems obvious that to be religious means to belong to one or another of these mutually exclusive groups. And each group has to be based on its own gospel, scripture or oral tradition and belief system. Second, because the teachings of the various religions are different and often contradictory, it seems logical that the teachings has to be confronted. An inquiry seems adequate to compare and categorize them, or even find out which is the true, or the truest, religion. The observer sees the world as filled with opposing religions that are effecting each other or confront with each other, but still can be described within their own borders. Moreover, this notion of the religions poses itself in an outsider position, that has an overview above the others.

This kind of concrete concept of religions born by the work of western scholars, during the last two hundred years or so, but by time became globally accepted. Not only in the west, but it has exported to the rest of the world. Through common education not only the scholars accepted it, but everybody, even the people of different traditions started to think of themselves as members of exclusive salvation-offering societies against others. People who are unaffected by the modern education still have different concepts about this.

6. The Change of the Idea

By the 18th century the understanding of religions has been changed already and a new idea of a private religion had been accepted. At this time, mostly based on the division in Christianity, the religious ideas were considered as distinguishable, mutually exclusive ideological communities. The extended researches in the 19th century deepened it more, added the historical dimension, perceiving the phenomena as complex organisms, each with its own long history. They created the histories of different religions, all separated from each other. In the 19-20th century the general scholarship has traced and studied these phenomena. The names of different religions were created by the western Christians, which they hoped to convert, and used later by the scholars who wanted to study them. For example: the terms of Hinduism and Buddhism are not the creations of the people of India, but these are western terms for the religious life of the people of India and for those who was influenced by the Buddha.

In the recent times there are more and more movements that wish to reconstruct the ways of researching the culture in India and to reconstruct the Indian people's self identification too. A series of conferences started in 2008 (Rethinking Religion in India) to reform the ways of research and thinking about India[55]. Some of the problems they discuss: are there religions in India? Is it possible to say that the descriptions of Indian culture and its religions are the products of the Western experience of India? The interesting thing is that the scholars came to an agreement very soon, and declared that there is nothing in India that could be called Hinduism. The notion of Hinduism as a religion was the idea of the Christian colonizers, the people of India never had any notion like this about themselves. Even though these researches are very fruitful, but they are still not effecting much the general picture of the religious studies.

When travelers the first time met the people of the east they were surprised because the world that they see was totally different form their own. It was difficult to apply the categorization of the European life there. When they met with Chinese people, for example, they saw that a person might belong to three different religions at once: Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. But this kind of classification of the religions belonged to the westerners. They used their western system of thinking to understand what they have met with in the east. They basically thought that a person has

55 http://www.rethinkingreligion.org/

to belong to one particular religion, and they perceived the former mentioned beliefs as different religions. Probably Chinese people did not perceive their life and belief this way.

This situation we can see here in Taiwan now. Lots of people, although if asking them, would consider themselves as Buddhist or Taoist[56], but in daily religious behavior and practice they are mixing[57] several religious concepts and customs. Most people live their lives without separating different religions and this does not mean that they don't know about it because of their lack in education, but these categories do not exist for them in the similar way as for the scholar. Those 'pure' religious categories are the products of the academia. These people would describe their religious life in different way, what is in lots of cases contradictory with the academical categories. For example, in the times when they need comfort or they are in hope for some positive changes in their lives they would pray or ask help from Buddhas or God or local gods. It will depend on their local culture. They would ask advice from masters or teachers they consider wise, independently of their 'religion'. The burning of 'ghost money' (金紙) is a common practice even in Buddhist families, although this practice contradicts with the fundamental Buddhist teaching of karma and reincarnation.

In the study of any religion we will face the following problem: the various streams of religious lives and traditions are internally diverse and richly various. Moreover they are subject to historical change, thus can not be characterized usefully in terms of some enduring essence. Without a continuous essence we should abandon this way of thinking and speaking in the scientific research.

7. The General Idea of Religion and the Idea of Religions

The idea of religion we can examine from two aspects. One is the idea of a concrete, named religion. This means the religions we know in the world, for example the Buddhism or Christianity. The essence of this idea lies in that the given religion has it concrete boundary. The given religion can flourish or travel to different countries, and at the same time preserving its essence. An other aspect is the general concept of religion, which is the 'religion' itself with its qualities, and all the

56 According to the '2006 Report on International Religious Freedom' (U.S. Department of State. 2006) 35.1% of the population belongs to Buddhism and 33.0% to Taoism.

57 The idea of mixing is the result of the western categorization. Actually there is nothing to mix. Their religious life is complete in itself.

known religions are specific instances of it. This is a different idea, which suggests that all the religions belong to the same kind of phenomena, they can be examined on the same bases with the same methodology.

The starting point for the idea of religion was Christianity, its teachings and its practices. The scholars inherited these concepts, even if they were non-believers, and interpreted the different phenomena of the world through them. The philosophy of the deists prepared the concept of the general idea of religion. Although they made connection between the different 'religious' manifestations around the world, grouping them together, but they treated all of them as instances of the underlying natural religion. The basic of the general idea of religion was an altered Christian idea extended to every cultures. By time, as the knowledge about the different cultures expanded, this basic understanding about religion also started to change. Even today it is still changing, as it can be seen in the newer and newer attempts to define it. In our opinion there is no the real source of this idea in the world, if we can realize that it is a part of a specific ideology only, then we should not try to 'fix' the definition, just abandon the idea itself.

The idea of religions, that suggest there are several, well separated religions in the world, all of them with their own boundaries is questionable too. It is impossible to show any 'pure' religion, that is coherent and self-dependent only. And who has the authority to define the boundaries of a religion? From what standpoint can one decide when did a religion started or ended? Different ideas and customs are continuously effecting each other in every communities. The so called 'religions' are under continuous change and can seen in various forms. In many cases if we check it in details then it is not so easy already to decide that a group belongs to which category. The Tibetan Buddhism usually treated as a form of Buddhism. But the most important scriptures[58], the tantric texts, are can not be originated from the historical Buddha's teachings, not historically, nor philosophically. These teachings came from the Hindu tantra, only the names of the categories they use have been changed to Buddhist ones. Based on some of the outside characteristics it is called 'Buddhism', but based on the teachings it also could be called 'Hinduism'.

58 According to the teachings of the Tibetan Buddhism the tantric teachings are the highest level teachings among all the Buddhist scriptures.

8. The Separation of Religious from Non-Religious

All that had been described so far, is a step toward to change our perception about the phenomena of religion. But there is an other step that could make a bigger change. There is a basic assumption, that divides the humanity into two kind of people: religious and non-religious. These two group of people have some essentially different characteristics. For example, the religious people are endowed by a belief system, while the non-religious people are not. If we examine this division with critical thinking we will find that, this kind of distinction has no ground, at least no logical one. It presupposes a kind of way of life that is natural, and supposes that the religious adds something extra to it. The distinction comes from strong habit of thinking, which organizes the perceiving phenomena according to its preconceptions. With deeper analysis we find the every people have their own belief systems, their own customs that can be perceived unfamiliar or meaningless from another point of view.

We can examine this from different point of views. First, through the definitions of the religion. Formerly we said that the definitions are not suitable to cover all the belief systems, or sometimes they are over spread of them. In this case it means the definition can also be used to describe the thinking ways of non-religious people. On the other hand the definitions are often not corresponding with the thinking way of the religious person, but describes the thoughts and point of view of the scholar as he faces the phenomenon not known by him.

There is an other problem that a researcher has to face: is a religion really understandable by an outsider? The person of belief has a personal point of view that shapes his perception, and the outsider also has a different one. Without trying to see the world through the eyes of the religion, the research would produce very different result. Only showing the observers reactions to the given phenomena. It is important because we are comparing two different frameworks of thinking, and this can make totally different interpretation of a given phenomenon. But the different interpretation, in the sense of different understanding, not necessarily appears in the language, as we have seen with the various meanings of the word 'religion'. Without the understanding of this interpretative situation the difference between meanings is not necessarily conspicuous, and can remain hidden from the researcher.

Moreover, even if there is a right approach to really understand a religion, for example, to be

the teacher of the given religion, it will take a very long time. And to make sure that one is really understands it there is a need for proper authorization. It would be very difficult for an outsider to master not only one but several religious teachings. A detailed research has to include every aspect of its object, and we can not neglect the spiritual side of a religion[59]. The information that can be collected from outside will not give enough understanding to know what is it like to live by that particular religion.

Our suggestion is that the study of religion is still in need of finding the proper ways for its research. As a first step it would be better to define the right methodology which is able to describe the observed phenomena without contradictions. To do this we have to make one step back, and re-examine our basic point of views. In order to do this we will use an other way to describe the process of understanding: the narrative theory.

59 By spiritual side we only mean the side that is not visible by an outsider.

Chapter IV: The Narrative Theory

In this chapter we are going to recreate Ricoeur's narrative theory, but not in the same way it has been used before. The general usage of the narrative theory is to examine or compare different narratives, such as the historiography and fiction, but only those fields that generally considered as narratives. We will use the word 'narrative' in a wider sense: we will use it to describe the nature of the human conceptual thinking and understanding. We understand humans manly as storytellers, narrative beings. Rationality appears only within the narrative and its coherence is limited to it. To explore this situation we will focus on the narrative plot as the basic structure of the understanding that works with the synthesis of heterogeneous elements based on the productive imagination. This approach indicates that the process of storytelling is not essentially different, but an expression of the process of human experiencing. Through the analysis of the laws of composition (poetics) we can get a picture about the laws of human understanding, or at least about the conceptual thinking. First we are going to examine this process generally to give an overall view of the narrative theory. Then we use this methodology to describe the 'religious' phenomena and show that the division of the religious and secular world is merely one possible way of narration from the many. This kind of narrative is rooted in a conditioned discriminative habit, shaped by the culture, and not an objective representation of the world. And last we will examine the problematic nature of giving preference for one narrative over the other.

To avoid misunderstanding there are two important types of narratives that we have to separate: first, the narrative can refer to a story, narration that describes something we know. Second, when we get to know something and during the process of understanding, this knowledge appears for us in the form of a narrative.

The first is a descriptive process, it put some ideas into an understandable form through language. It can be knowledge, memories, hopes, something that we already posses and we wish to recreate it in language. Usually to make it accessible for others or to keep preserved for ourselves. It also serves a goal and according to this goal the proper form of narrative has to be choose. The goal can be entertainment through poetry, novels or a funny speech. It can express knowledge in the form of academical writings or express wisdom through stories. The point is: in this case of the narrative

we have our message or goal ready and we just chose the proper way to expose it.

In the second sense the narrative process does not describe the world but creates it. This step is before the former, well known, process of expression. It happens before we decide to describe, at the moment when we get to know something by the collection of data during experiencing. Simply by just being-in-the-world and focusing on any part of it, the world will manifest in an orderly way, forming a story. To really understand this process we have to examine it in a more detailed way, and later will we focus on its importance in the academical research, especially its importance in the religious studies. To introduce briefly how does this effects the study lets see what happens when we examine a cultural phenomenon. The observation works by selecting only certain kind of data and only a certain way. In the narrative theory we will realize that this subjective selection is based on the narrative plot that basically is hidden behind the process. But this hidden plot can be reconstructed and brought into light by the analysis of the produced narratives.

The difference between the two kind of narratives lies in this: the narrative's creative process in experience is not conscious, it is not under our control, but its descriptive process is under control, at least more or less. Later on we will examine this part of the narrative in details.

1. The Narrative World

The creation of the world by narrative does not mean the creation of the so called physical world, but the creation of a 'narrative world'. The narrative world is the collection of all the rules that composing the given story. It has its own inner logic, and its rationality can be understood only within its own boundaries. The separation of the narrative world from the physical world does not equal with the ideas of subjective idealism. Even though the narrative theory treats the concept of the physical world only as an element in a description, but it treats the category of mind too. The materialist or the idealist descriptions are both merely different kind of narratives, formulating different narrative worlds.

There are two important parts of a narrative world that we have to recognize: the fundamental and consequential elements of it. The fundamental elements are those components that can not be proven, they are presupposed in the narrative. In other words the narrative is unfolded within these characteristics. The consequential elements are the logical consequences that are based on the

fundamental elements. For example, in the former mentioned opposition of materialistic and idealist descriptions of the world, the narratives in both cases are lean on one fundamental element: on the matter in one case and on the mind in the other. It is possible to give a logically coherent description of the world with both fundamental elements. It is also possible by following logical steps within one narrative to get a result that leads us to the other. In this cases a paradigm shift can occurs and a change to an other type of narrative.

The fundamental and consequential elements are often change position in different narratives: a word that denominates a fundamental element in one narrative often used as a consequential in an other one. Not knowing this, a reflection on an other narrative easily can end up in misunderstanding by implying a meaning that was not there originally, or missing a similarity because of the different word-use. This kind of approach can be very important in the religious and cultural studies, because different cultures produce narratives with different fundamental elements.

During the analysis of a narrative we will focus on the 'narrative world', which is the world that the given narration produces. The narrative world is the world of Being, being-there, at least in the sense of a conceptual Being. But the state which usually we can be aware of is the conceptual part of Being, therefore it lies under the rule of linguistic description.

In this interconnectedness of Being and language our interest is to understand the narrative worlds that appears in the different cultures. And we suggest that the most fruitful way of examining the data in the religious studies is adopting the narrative approach.

2. The Word and the Meaning

In any narratives the words are the basic elements that serve the construction of the plot. But this might be true in the sense of building a sentence grammatically, but not true in the sense of building a story. The words in themselves bear no concrete meaning, they got their meaning as they are placed in context. The sentence comes first in meaning and the words are just elements that support the creation of the sentence. And the sentence gets its meaning as it takes its place in the plot, which is the part of the whole story of the narrative. Consequently, to understand the meaning of a word we have to understand it as a part of the whole story.

The difficulty to understand other narratives and the possibility for misinterpretation increases

when a description appears familiar, similar to a known narrative. In this case the words in a specific narrative are equated with words in an other. But the meaning connected to a word in one narrative is not necessarily present in another narrative, even though if many words are similar.

It is important to ask the questions: can we understand the meaning of a word, and in what extend can we understand a fundamentally different narrative? The literal translation of a word is not always possible, and a paraphrase, although can help, but it still uses the words and concepts of our narrative's. It is definitely not possible to know the meaning without the understanding of in what situations the word is used. By knowing the situations we can know the purpose of its usage.

There are two goals we would like to attain with the adaptation of the narrative theory. First, we want to show the nature of the general narratives used in the religious studies, to point out that their categories and descriptions are not merely descriptive but creative. Second, to point out that there are no universally true narratives, their truthfulness lies in their capacity to serve a goal. Studying different culture's narratives based on the basic categories generally present in every narratives gives us the chance for a fruitful description and comparison.

3. The Narrative as the Nature of the Human Understanding

We can describe the human understanding as something with an inner drive to tell a story. In this process of storytelling the notion of the word, objects and events are recreated in language, and a wish to know connections between the elements of the story arises. This 'knowing of connections' means seeing-them-as-connected. This is the intelligible characteristic of the story, but this does not presume the existence of a self-sufficient cause and effect relation except as an expression of this intelligibility.

We will use the narrative as an alternative for the description of human understanding and conceptual thinking. Our point of view of the human condition is based on the ideas of existentialist philosophers like, Heidegger, Ricoeur or Merleau-Ponty. But we are focusing on the narrative part of this Being.

The elements of the descriptions made by the use of the narrative theory are primarily treated as components of the narrative. This means there will be no claims to describe the real nature of the world apart from a narrative. We take any description of any phenomena as a specific narrative. This

will avoid the problems arising from a dualistic point of view and at the same time we have the responsibility to stay away from both sides of extremities: the materialism and the idealism. Moreover, these two sides of oppositions we treat as belong to a specific cultural region. It is not necessarily exists the same way in descriptions of an other culture.

The importance of making it clear is that the descriptions in the religious studies are belong to materialistic descriptions, which is for us is only one type of narrative. And the descriptions in many 'religious' texts are not necessarily belong to this group. The academical research treat these text as they are describing the same 'world' as the researcher sees. And they hold that the difference lies in their understanding, or more likely their non-understanding, of that world. But in our approach, a scientific research can focus only on the 'narrative world', can not on the real world behind it. The observed narrative world can be very different from the researcher's own point of view. The reconstruction of the 'religious' text in the researcher's world can be different from the original to a great extent.

The storytelling habit of the human understanding is so natural that usually nobody pays attention to it. It remains hidden in the sense that when there is a reference to something or to a situation by a narrative, it is not appearing as a mere narrative creation to us but as reality. In other words: people generally would accept that the description of a phenomena is nevertheless implicitly different from the phenomena itself and only represents it, but they do not recognize that besides the description there is no any other reference. Putting an equation between understanding and narration raises a lot of issues about epistemology, the nature and possibility of knowledge and truth, but in this paper we will not entertain all of these problems. After the understanding of narrative theory we will focus only on its connections with the concept of religion.

The first important step is to understand the meaning of the basic concepts constituting the narrative theory. We will describe the general characteristics briefly and focusing more on parts that are connected to the main topic of the paper. Unlike Ricoeur's writings, which mainly focus on text interpretation, most of the presented concepts will refer to the nature of the human understanding, not to literary works. Although the following explanation of narrative theory is inspired by Ricoeur's writings, it does not follow it in every aspect. Only some elements can be found in his works, most have been created from re-thinking the theory and connected it with the religious studies.

4. Temporality

In his essay “On interpretation”[60], Ricoeur starts with the mutual depending character of the storytelling and temporality. We will start with this feature and unfold the whole system of storytelling from it.

The story can not exist in any other medium but in time. It is essential for its existence. Even if we try, we can not imagine a story without time sequence. There can be a collection of sentences or events, but without being in a linear timeline they are not understandable.[61] It is the same with the human experience, as it unfolds temporally. A series of events can be intelligible only if they are manifested in time sequence. The word 'series' in itself already includes the notion of time. We have to mention that this temporal character of storytelling and of the human experience does not have to refer to an objective time, on the contrary, it can raise doubt about it. It only shows that in every case when there is an understanding of a series of events, the human understanding can grasp it in a temporal way only. There is no such object of experience as 'time'. We never meet the 'time' itself but we have a concept about it. Its reality is clearly different from the reality of sounds or feelings. But the words 'time' and 'temporality' do exist. There are researches about the nature of the time. In fact it is often regarded as a kind of physical reality, some theorists say it was created along with matter during the Big Bang.

According to the narrative theory time is an essential component of the narrative. It means it is a necessary element of the human conceptual understanding, consequently it is meaningless to talk about time apart from the narrative. But it does not necessarily mean that the narrative creates the time. That would be the case for sure only if the narrative could precede time, but that is impossible. We can only say if there is a narrative then there is time and if there is time then there is a narrative.

The 'time' according to the general understanding is the serial in which one thing follows another. A measuring system that can sequence events, or measure the durations of events, but it exist independently as the continuous sequence of events created time-line with past, present and future. For the narrative theory it is only one from the numerous possible narratives of time. And a time concept that is a part of our modern life is not necessarily the same as before, for example, two

60 Ricoeur (1991) p. 2

61 The story in its expressed form does not have to be linear, but the collected parts have to have a linear variation, even if we don't know that variation.

thousand years ago. If we treat the time this way then we open up for narratives with a different explanation of time. The general point of view during text interpretation is an understanding of historical time which is the object of historical studies. It is treated as the real time in the world and other narratives, like a biblical time, is viewed as mythological time.

We will treat temporality as an attribute of the understanding, but it doesn't mean that in different narratives, for example, in science or in an idealist philosophy, a very different role of time can not be accepted. It depends how it fulfills the goal it has been used to serve for. The time concept of different cultures, especially concepts has been used in the past, with very different descriptions from the modern usage have no inferior position.

The concept of time has a close connection with how people understand history. The concept of the modern history is not the only way to represent the past, but this kind of approach was spread trough the world by the colonization. This history view has an other important effect: it places different countries and cultures in a specific position. In the sense of 'civilization' it posits them on an imaginary time-line which is described as a line of progression, from a less civilized state toward a more civilized. The newer states are generally in a higher position then the former ones, and they are capable of observe and understand the former ones. If this is accepted then the different cultures can be placed on one stage of civilization, creating lower ones (the third world) and higher ones (the west). It has a serious consequence for the 'lower level' countries: they are treated as tailed off, as they are living a life now that has been lived before by the more civilized countries. It means that they can be characterized and understood by the past of those countries. And on the other hand their future is fixed, and can be imagined only as they are catching up with the modern countries. This kind of understanding of history has no any rational base. There is no way to tell which country is in a more developed state generally. Development can be measured only if there is a criteria and fixed direction for development. But what is the right direction for humanity? Of course, because of the dominant position of the west in the world, the standards are modeled from the west. To be modern and civilized one has to mimic specific moral values, social and political structures, philosophical thoughts and history. One has to create specific city structures and use specific technology.

In fact, there is no any objective way to tell that the progress of history lead to any real development. It is true that by time there are more complex technologies available, and the collection of knowledge is growing, but this does not imply that humanity is in a path toward

something objectively good or higher. From the information we have, humanity could be on a wrong path too, it is possible that the increasing focus on technology, and the accumulation of information are signs of degradation, the sign of humanity's lost understanding about their place in the world. We are not in a position to make a judgment about it, we only wish to point out the relative nature of concepts like progress and civilization.

5. Events and Occurrences

In order to make the dependent and non-objective nature of every narrative clear, we are going to create a description, that points out an important moment during any human experience. This can illuminate the relative nature of every descriptions and of the human experience.

The temporal experience is constituted by series of events. These events are limited in number, but in the real world there is unlimited possibility for events. To take this into account we have to distinguish the events from an other category: the occurrences. We will use this word here in the sense of triggers in the world that has the potential to grab the attention. The attention focusing toward it makes it intelligible by interpretation and thus become an event. But we have to make it clear that the occurrence in itself, without being perceived has no meaning. When there is a meaning then we are already inside the narrative. The occurrence is referring to the world before the narrative shapes it. Actually this concept is a tool only to make it easier to understand the creative process of understanding, but it does not points to a concrete existent.

In the daily use of language - and often in the scientific too - there is no clear separation of these two categories. The occurrence can not be perceived or realized, what appears as noticed is the event. To say an other way: the occurrence has no meaning, when it becomes meaningful it is already changed into an event, which is intelligible and a part of the story.

We suppose that there are unlimited occurrences and there could be unlimited variations of notions of events in a given situation. But the events constituting a story are limited. An occurrence becomes an event only if it has something to do with the story. But, as we said before, the occurrence itself has no meaning, so it can have relation with the story only if something makes it related. Or from an other point of view, the occurrence can relate to the story if there is a possible

way to form it into a related event. From this we have to say that the story is not merely a composition of random events, but events that are chosen with purpose. This choice does not have to be intentional in the process of understanding. Intentional in the sense that we know about what event we need and intentionally choose it. These 'choices' are came from discriminatory habit of the understanding. Not discriminatory in a negative sense, but by the basic nature of human understanding which chooses, or we can say creates, only one event over the unlimited other at one time.

If we take a period of time and space, its not difficult to understand that the number of narratives describe it are numberless. We can examine it by the means of the different sciences (biology, geology, history) and all the results from these different descriptions will show a totally different picture. Probably we would even don't realize that two descriptions are talking about the same time-space sequence.

For example, we choose a hundred year period in specific location. A historical narrative could describe it in the light of global political events to point out those events' effect on that place and its inhabitants. The main focus of this kind of description still could be the global political map, and the local life would appear as it is effected by it. The focus also could shift merely to that specific local area, without any global reference. In this sense the description would be very different. There would be no connection to any outside events, so the reasons of the local events would be searched locally. The general historicity usually focuses on the life of the ruling class and on events of war. But there are unlimited other choices. It could be focused on a particular person. This happens if that person has some importance in the form of autobiography. But it could be the autobiography of any person, or family. Besides focusing on human lives and relations, it is possible to describe animal lives. It can be one specific animal, or animals in general. This would move the field of research closer to biology. In the field of meteorology it is possible to give the 'history' of weather change in that specific area. Or within that focusing on the climate change and global warming will take in the examination of CO2 level. This will lead us to the field of chemistry. And general weather report and a report focusing only on the CO2 level and the change in temperature will give a totally different picture. Within all these disciplines it is possible to focus numberless, irrelevant objects. And all within the limits of this specific time and space sequence. Although the object of research is the same in the sense it happens in the same time and space, but the object of research

differs in the sense of what the methodology is and the desired results are.

This is exactly the nature of the events. The events are not found merely in the world, but created through the plot, the means by we describing the world. What actually there are the unlimited occurrences. The occurrences did not change in any of the former possible descriptions.

The story is not a story if it is not intelligible. For this, two conditions have to be fulfilled: first, the event in itself has to be intelligible, and second, the events in relation with each other. In both of these cases the role of the productive imagination will get in, but this will be explained later.

This part has an important consequence to consider in the religious studies: there are no such occurrence that necessarily would imply any 'religious activity' in the world. The certain 'religious' events are formulated by the power of storytelling. The basically neutral occurrences are picked out and changed to events through the plot. An intention to find religion has to be there at the first place in order to see it in the world. Without that presupposition no religious-secular distinction can be found.

6. Plot and Emplotment

The set of combinations of events are called plot. This holds the events together. The active function that puts the events together is the emplotment. The emplotment is dynamic and active during the whole process of storytelling. The whole plot can be read out from the story only when it is complete, but the function of emplotment is there from the beginning.

In this sense the narrative of a told story and the narrative of the human understanding diverges here. In a told story the plot and actually the whole story is known by the storyteller, and it gets its form through the language. But during the process of human understanding the whole story and the plot is usually not known. What is known is the recreation of it during an inner narrative, the way we are conceptually thinking, commenting the events for ourselves.

Driven by the plot a wide variety of incidents drawn together and structured under the intelligibility. These incidents do not have to have anything in common, but they are gaining similar characteristics form the productive imagination, thus the *synthesis of heterogeneous elements* is made. It is important to realize that the plot does not arise from the events. The events in themselves have no power to build a story. Although in a novel the following sequential events unfold the story,

but in fact during the creative process it is inverted. The emplotment is the creative process that organizes the events to create an intelligible whole. This dichotomy between the reading and the creation of the story is very important. When someone describes his understanding about a topic he 'reads' the 'story' of his understanding, but when he just observes the choice that makes events out of occurrences are not under his control.

About the human experience we have to mention that, originally, it is a very restricted process. It is limited by the physical organs and their functionality, and by the direction of attention. The five physical organs are able to perceive only a tiny part of the physical world, only five type of data from the numerous. Moreover within this five type, the the range of perception is very limited compared to different animal senses or possible artificial ones. From this limited source there is a further selection of the noticeably relevant events. There are lots of notions, much greater in number, but without interest they become forgotten soon. Some of them can be recalled later, if their importance arise, but most of them are lost forever. So the final source for the human understanding is quite limited. And from this limited source there will be a further selection to create a story. This is the situation every time, when we are talking about the human process of cognition. All the activities belonging to the human cognition have to be treated in regard to this limited situation.

7. Productive Imagination

The productive imagination produces the plot. It is always there behind the understanding. This assertion has an important consequence: all of our understandings and explanations, even the scientific ones, are the products of the productive imagination. And as its name suggests, it is a kind of imagination. But it is not an imagination in a negative sense, it does not mean that this is a mere dream or illusion without any reality or functionality. Nor is it an opposition of the word 'reality' or 'truth'. It only means that for any understanding and for any activity there must be an imaginary understanding of that situation, because the situation in itself, before the narrative, can not be the object of understanding. The understanding is the part of the story, and that has to be created, 'imagined'. The opposition of the objective and subjective understanding is meaningless in this context.

The importance of the productive imagination is evident: without it we could not take any

actions. The productive imagination creates schemes, it can be very useful even for predicting future events, as science do. But we have to doubt what the scientific realism asserts, such as 'the science describes the real world'. It would mean that the world actually is as science takes it, irrespective of that the world of science unfolds through the process of narration. This kind of thinking endows physical reality to a narrative world, a narrative reality, which although talks about physical reality but itself has no physical qualities.

A description gives knowledge about a situation to let us accomplish a desirable action, that can be a physical or a mental action, but it has nothing to do with its reality in an objective sense. Thus the productive imagination is an indispensable condition of, not only the scientific research, but the daily life.

8. Characteristics of Temporality

There are several characteristics of experience that we have to attribute to the existence of the story. We talked about the temporality itself. In reference of events, or even physical objects the temporal character manifests in three levels: beginning, middle and end. We can use different words when in a story we are referring to object or people: coming to existence – existing – destruction for objects, and birth – life – death for living beings.

In the case of a literal work it is very easy to understand these three characteristics as the parts of introduction, exposition and conclusion of a story. The story is complete if all this three are present. We can expound this in relation with the events too. In the running of the story an appearance of a new event is its beginning, concerning the given plot. The birth of a new event happens inside the story, within the plot. But here too, as in many other cases, we do not have to think about an objective beginning. In an other story it is not necessarily the same, the process of the event can be in an other stage or can be in a less emphatic situation. It can be totally indifferent too for an other story, thus non-existent in an other narration with different plot.

For example we can examine a daily situation: the meeting of a doctor and a patient. If we describe it from both sides we will get different results. In the doctor's case he meets several patients every day without any one of them being special. All the meetings with patients will be equal parts of the story of his working time. But for the patient it is not a regular event, entering the doctors

room creates a new situation. Here an occurrence does not indicate a prominent event in the first case but indicates in the second.

Or the event of the lunar New Year, as a new beginning it is a reality for a group of people, but not for everybody, because, for example, most of the western people never even heard about it. And in the chain of continuously changing days this day has no any prominent role by itself.

An other example: the murder of a person means the end of his life, but for the police investigator it is the beginning of a new case. Therefore, for the investigator all the moments and the story of the deceased's life are irrelevant and only those moments become relevant that gives any progress to the resolution of the case. Here an occurrence is an ending event in one case, but beginning event in an other case.

We have to examine the three characteristics of temporality from an other perspective too, as we did with other ideas. The meaning of these three concepts are understandable only in the story. As we mentioned before, about the time itself, now we can repeat here: everything that is recounted have to go through these stages. So the reality of the birth, existence and death makes sense only inside the frame of the story, it comes to be through narration. Outside of the narrative we can not find anything that could begin, exist and decease by itself. Concerning the existence of humans it is rather an interesting issue. And here we have to remember that different cultures are telling different stories about the world. This means their division of these three stages concerning a given topic can be very different. There can be differences in the understanding of the human life, when does it begin and when does it end[62]. Or the childhood and the adulthood. There are differences about when does a relationship begins between two people and in what situation can it be ended. Because of the dominance of the west, people usually think that these are fixed categories. And even the scientific descriptions (for example in the question of life) are just one from the many narratives, not ultimate truths.

9. Causality

An other characteristics of the story that we have to examine is the causality. The emplotment weaves the events together in the form of causal relationships. The successive events are making

62 It can be one life only or the series of lives, like in the teaching of reincarnation.

sense because they have causal connection between them. An important characteristics of the plot is: it have to be able to answer the question of 'why?'. We can ask about the reason of an event in the story, and the reason will be found in a preceding event. But an answer to the question 'why?' does not give an overall explanation of the given situation. It only points out a former event and because of the situation of being-in-a-plot it is intelligible and appears as logical. The narrative nature of causality might not appear as evident. The reason of this is might be that it is easy to mix up the category of the occurrences with the events. An occurrence that is causing an event can be a part of different plots with events sometimes overlapping each other. Thus it can appear in many different chains of events, but the preceding and subsequent events can be diverse in other plots. An event gets it meaning in a causal way with the other events, but before it takes its place in the narrative there is no meaningful way to talk about causality. Finding a cause and effect relationship other than the explanation in a given story is not possible. Likewise taking out an event from a story and describe it off-plot. These kind of intentions can be seen quite often though.

The causality in this way is not presented as the part of the nature, but as part of the narrative. When we look around and see the cause and effect relationships around us in the world it is because the working narrative, it creates the story of the natural world. In this sense the narrative theory does not go against the common sense or the scientific view. But it holds that these descriptions are only one kind of narratives, and there are others that would describe causality in an other way, or ignore it. For example, Dignāga[63] the Indian philosopher held the Buddhist idea that no dharmas are everlasting, in their nature they are all doomed to destruction. This temporality is the reason why the objects fall apart in the end. When we drop an object, like a cup, to the ground and it breaks into pieces, the real reason that it is broken is not its fall to the ground. The real reason was its temporality, hitting the ground was a surrounding condition that brought the real reason out. This kind of narrative does not go against the common sense, but formates unusual descriptions, and focuses on the causality from a different point of view.

What we intended to present so far is that in human experience everything is told as a story: the history of ourselves and the history of others. Even physical object, ideas and concepts in our life are all intelligible because they are parts of a story. Usually we think the word in itself carry the meaning, but if we examine it in details we will find the understanding of the meaning of a word

63 Dignāga - 陳那論師 (c 480-540 CE)

can happen only because we can place it in a situation. The meaning of the word 'chair', for example, can not be separated from the action of sitting down, sitting on something. And this is nothing else but the collection of events related to the process of sitting.

10. The Protagonist and the Focal Character

Now we are going to introduce an other characteristic of the story: the protagonist. It is the central figure of a literary work or a real event. The events are revolving around the protagonist in the sequence as the plot dictates. It means that the events are relevant only in the sense of having something to do with the protagonist. As the emplotment is an operation, selecting and arranging the events, the collection of these events is the plot, the protagonist is the central reference of the events. But we have to emphasize their interdependent character. The protagonist does not have to be an independent existent besides of the story. Using different words we can focus on different aspects of the story, but their meaning is only unfolded through their intermingled relation. Thus the concepts of event, plot and protagonist are just enlightening the whole process of storytelling and human experience from various point of views.

Here I am using the concept of the protagonist in a wider sense, not only in relation with literature but with the everyday experience, and not only as a reference to a person but to any human concepts. During the description of an idea, putting it in the center of narration, all the occurrences that can be related to it and has importance at the given moment will be built into the story as an event, and this process is controlled by the creative imagination. This means the occurrence will be interpreted as an event related to the plot, formed in one way from the unlimited possibilities of interpretation. The protagonist can be a person or the 'self', an ideology, a concept, a country an activity etc. Because of its appearance as existent, it makes only the formation of those kind of events possible, that has connection with it and confirms its existence. The description using a protagonist makes the story easily understandable and acceptable, even if the protagonist is only an imaginary formation.

In the narrative of a research, the object of focus often appears as a protagonist, in the center of the story. For example, the idea of 'religion' in the religious studies. In the descriptions there are numerous references to its past or future, to its characteristics and to its relationship with other fields

of life. The way of talking about 'the religion' makes it feel like everybody knows what it is. Without being able to define what religion means there are numerous researches about it, and all these descriptions are giving a coherent, linear history of a given religion, or the religions as global phenomena. In this story the events have been collected and put in order to make an intelligible plot about the religion(s). The result, even if understandable, it does not necessarily refers to any objective, or at least clearly circumscribed phenomena. The same happens with the history of a country[64] or even with the history of a person.

An other aspect of the descriptions is the habit to personalize the object, this way the protagonist appears in the story, it comes to life. It is very common to describe the history of a religion with words and expressions usually applied to people, like: it was born, moved to an other country, adapted to the circumstances or get in conflict with other religions. The habit to describe an idea with this kind of rhetoric makes it easier to grasp and easier to accept. People tend to accept narratives much easier if the narratives are expressed in a way that they can relate to it.

11. Opposing Stories

Lot of times the reason behind an opposition is the contrast between different type of narratives. The different references in descriptions are not necessarily evident if there has not been made an analysis to detect it. There are many examples in the history on political or philosophical level. The debate and opposition between sides can not get any further because narratives based on different categories. The great debate between the realist and idealist philosophy about the process of cognition is one example. In both cases there is a narrative, a story built up from elements, practically speaking events, that are arranged in the process of emplotment. But what is essentially different between them is the focus point, the protagonist, that is in one case the matter and in the other case is the mind. From this we can say that the matter or the mind are not really the conclusions of these arguments, but they are there from the beginning and shaping the story through the process of emplotment. Therefore it is not possible to win an argument between them because they are telling different stories with an essentially different but consistent plot and protagonist. But

64 Taiwan's history and situation is a very good example, if we examine the differences between descriptions of the Republic of China (ROC) and the People's Republic of China (PRC)

the structure of the narrative is similar in both cases.

We have to mention that the realism, or at least the naive realism, is the general way of the human understanding recently. The idealist view for most of the people came from analytical thinking, often in the field philosophy. But this not necessarily the case in every situation, for example the so called mystical experiences. To make an elemental change in the way of perceiving the world, in both formerly mentioned cases, there must be a shift in paradigm. From the point of view of the narrative theory it means the ending of a story and the beginning of a new one. A dramatical ending can have such a great effect that can cause essential changes in the future storytelling. This can happen from an extensive philosophical analysis with a really strong wish for understanding, or some kind of shocking effect that takes the person out from his usual narrative environment.

The very different narrative approaches to a subject do not mean that there could be no meaningful debate about it at all. It is possible in two ways. There can be a debate about the better functionality of the narratives, which narrative gives a better description for a desired result. If the desired result is agreed, then the level of functionality is measurable. An other way is to point out inconsistency inside a given narrative. To do this one has to follow the logical structure of the given narrative and try to point out that it leads to contradiction. It has to be proven without referring to an opposing narrative. The critique on the definition of religion, which shows that a given definition on the one hand does not cover all the religious phenomena, on the other hand it can be used to describe non-religious phenomena, is belongs to this kind of argumentation.

We would like to use this methodology by rethinking the general categories of religious studies. If a concrete definition of religion could be created than it would be possible to build up a consistent narrative to describe the religious phenomena. The problem with a definitions of religion probably would be that using it consistently will create a difference between the object of the definition and the daily notion of religion. For the religious studies this is a decision has to be made.

12. Ideology and Narrative

The two concepts, the ideology and the narrative, we can easily put together to make more complete picture of the human understanding. We can say that every ideology has its own way to

narrate certain events. Approaching from the other side, it is true, that a set of corresponding narrative ways are constituting an ideology. In the narrative theory there is no opposition or hierarchical difference between the different narratives, for example, between science and ideology (in the negative sense) or science and religion. This gives us a world with multiple ideologies and their expressions. Even if we say that there is no hierarchical difference between them in an objective level, but there is a difference in how they serve a purpose.

An important question that we have to consider is the possibility of self-reflection within a given narrative. The dynamic operation of the emplotment does not appear as an object. But this does not mean that it can not be observed at all. It can be concluded from the sequence and relation of the events. By observing the different characteristics of an event and the series of events in their dependent relation, we can have a clear picture about the function behind them. But for this we have to understand and keep in mind that the events got their attributes from the function of emplotment, the results are not referring to actual characteristics without it. This method can be used in two ways. First it can give a picture about the a given narrative. Second, we can understand the working mechanism of the narratives in general, that is, the process of storytelling.

The conclusion from this is that the majority of the researches in the religious studies are based on one main kind of narrative. This narrative is accepting only one kind of interpretation of time, causality and focal character. In other world the structure of the story is already given, even before the beginning of any research. The details might be different, but the main components of the story are the same. Its focal character is 'the religion' or 'a religion' which comes to be real through the specific way of storytelling. This narrative puts this imagined object in a predestined historical time-line, and creates events form the unlimited occurrences by selecting and forming them according to the plot. Also creates a causal relationship with other parts of the life, like politics and society. The 'religion' treated as a living being can came to be, and perform actions, effecting people. Others can effect it too which might change some of its characteristics but not its essence. When the focal character of the story is treated as an independently existent object and the plot evolves around it, the whole story can be totally reasonable. And because of its expressed way, it is not easy to see its real, narrative nature.

We think that the reasons we provided are enough to prove its illusory nature. The historical analysis of the idea of religion, shows how did it came to be in a specific socio-cultural medium,

and how it has been maintained and exported to the world through the colonization. The descriptions about the nature of the human understanding, using the ideology and the narrative as a main tool, shows us that different thinking ways can build any kind of theories without the need of real reference in the world.

The approach used in the religious studies we consider as a product of certain political and theological intentions, and in the following chapter we are going to show some alternative ways to study these phenomena.

Chapter V: Alternative approaches

At this point, in the light of the former explanations, we have to summarize what we mean by 'narrative', and what are the consequences of accepting and using it in the research. First, we have to make it clear that the word 'narrative', here in the narrative theory, is not just an other word for 'interpretation'. The 'interpretation' is an explanation or elucidation of meaning. The narrative does not describe a reality in an interpretive way but creates it. Before the narrative it makes no sense to talk about a reality, in the conceptual sense. When we start to describe something the reality of it comes to existence. It doesn't mean that we can not talk about a 'world' or 'reality' behind the narrative, but we have to keep in mind that the narrative is not equal with that 'world' and it does not simply describes it. This means that whatever we can say that will be never equal with a reality behind it. We have to recognize those attributes that belong to the structure of the narrative only, and we can not impose these on an underlying world.

In other words, we have to recognize the ways how we usually talk about something, and realize these as 'ways of talking' or storytelling. We see the humans primary as storytelling beings, and only then as beings of reason.[65] In the human understanding the 'mythos' has more importance over 'logos'. Actually, the word 'logos' had a change in meaning during history. Originally it had meanings like story, discourse or reason, but around the time of Plato and Aristotle its meaning reduced to philosophical reason. In the narrative theory the reason appears as a characteristics of the narrative. Something is reasonable only within the narrative, only if there is no inner contradiction. But it has nothing to do with the descriptions in other narratives, and with ultimate truth. As far as the story's inner elements are coherent we can talk about reason.

For example, there are the famous books and movies about the young wizard Harry Potter. The story takes place in an alternative Earth, where there is a hidden society of wizards and supernatural beings. The young Harry, as an apprentice wizard, learns how to use magic, and he often uses his magic wand to cast spells. The whole story, with its magical supernatural events, is always coherent. After the reader understood the basic laws of this world, even though more and more strange, supernatural events are taking place, they don't contradict with the story's plot and the narrative

65 Fisher (1987) p.xiii

world. If once, when facing an enemy, Harry were take out a shotgun and shoot on his enemies that would ruin the inner coherence of the story. Every reader would feel that way. But in fact everybody knows that there are shotguns in the world, even in the world of Harry Potter. And most of the people does not believe in the existence of magical wands, and in the use of magic. Still, an event that is real for everybody would make no sense in the world of Harry Potter, it would be irrational. This is the nature of the reason, the inner coherence in the narratives. Every time when we are relying on reason, we are relying on the inner coherence of a narrative world. This coherence can be tested only by looking for inner contradictions, or by testing the narrative's compatibility with the experiences in the world. For example, if we never see trolls running around in the world and magic spells, or nobody whom we trust says there are such things, then we can have a reasonable doubt in the story of Harry Potter and not accept it as reality only treat it as an entertaining fairy-tale. But it is a very different situation with writings from the ancient times, from cultures long disappeared. We can not know for sure the reason of those texts, and the exact meanings of the words from ancient times.

There are many words that we use in a daily basis: matter, mind, time, space, person, object etc. Although they can be easily used in the daily language, there are many philosophical discourses trying to find out their real nature. The full recognition and examination of these would need further philosophical research. For us, in the religious studies, there are some important words besides the word 'religion' that can make us understand the nature of cultural studies and text interpretation, like: god, transcendent, worship etc. Later we will take some examples and examine them in details.

An other important question we have to examine is the changing nature of the narratives. Is there a narrative that will be true in any times, in the past and the future as well? Or the narratives have to change with time, following the people's understanding? Our point of view on this is - because the meaning is actually part of the human beings, not the narrative itself - in order to bring up the same understanding in different times and different places, there is a need to reconstruct and rephrase narratives. The narrative is nothing else but a tool to bring out a desired effect in the person. The effect can be a felling, an action or knowledge. The same text in different cultures will make different effects; in one it can make people to understand some essential features of the world, in an other maybe only raise aesthetic notions or mere entertainment. Take an example from the

Upanishads[66]:

"Verily the dawn is the head of the horse which is fit for sacrifice, the sun its eye, the wind its breath, the mouth the Vaisvanara fire, the year the body of the sacrificial horse. Heaven is the back, the sky the belly, the earth the chest, the quarters the two sides, the intermediate quarters the ribs, the members the seasons, the joints the months and half-months, the feet days and nights, the bones the stars, the flesh the clouds. The half-digested food is the sand, the rivers the bowels, the liver and the lungs the mountains, the hairs the herbs and trees. As the sun rises, it is the forepart, as it sets, the hindpart of the horse. When the horse shakes itself, then it lightens; when it kicks, it thunders; when it makes water, it rains; voice is its voice."[67]

What is the meaning of this quote? What does the author talking about? It seems to be an obvious answer that it is talking about the horse sacrifice[68]. Making importance to the ritual by connecting elements from the cosmos to the horse's body. Or is it a symbolic description of the cosmos as a horse? Then actually this is about the cosmos, and the horse only helps the understanding. The problem is that although we have some ideas about a horse sacrifice, and some ideas about a horse, we do not have that lived experience as one had in that culture. We do not have the same experience of the horse as the people had that time. We connect some imaginary pictures to all the elements of this description, but we have no idea what did all these meant for the people of that time. If this text is a description of the universe then to make it understand, one has to rephrase it in a familiar way. The person who wrote it probably has experience about the horse sacrifice, for him it is something very personal. If we take, for example, a car mechanic, it would make sense for him if we change the parts of the horse to the parts of the car. As he understands the functioning of the car as a whole, he could get a picture of the world through it. There are descriptions that characterize the universe as a clockwork in the 'clockwork universe theory'. Or we can have a

66 The Upanishads are constitute a category of Vedic literature. The earlier ones linked to one of the four Vedas. There are eleven or thirteen major ones, they are widely accepted as authentic, composed between 900 and 600 BC.

67 Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad, First Adhyaya, Firs Brahmana; The Upanishads, Part 2 (SBE15), by Max Müller, [1879], at sacred-texts.com; pp 73-74.

68 The Ashvamedha (aśvamedhá) was an important royal ritual of the Vedic tradition. There are descriptions of it in the Rigveda (RV 1.162-163, aśvamedha), the Yajurveda (TS 7.1-5, VSM 22–25) or in the Shatapatha Brahmana (ŚBM 13.1–5).

description of the universe as a computer[69]. Actually this is not an uncommon way of description. Even scientist use a lot of analogies to explain theories, not only to make it easier to understand for others, but for themselves too. An analogy is always following the ways of expression and vocabulary of the given culture. In this sense talking about the universe through the body of the sacrificial horse is not special or 'religious'. It is the same kind of description that we have now, even in the scientific world, just according to that time's narratives.

Therefore we do not accept that there can be a description that is regardless of the person who understands it would carry an undying message. The message becomes intelligible through a person. This shows that there is no any narrative that should be accepted objectively true, even if it is a scientific one. The scientific narratives make sense only in our time, combined with a specific cultural background. The researcher should try to avoid any interpretation of ancient narratives through modern narrative categories, and should try to translate the old words to a modern meaning, by finding in what situation those words have been used.

1. Personification

The matter of personification is a rather interesting case. Besides the important implications in philosophy it has a lot to do with the describing methodology of religious studies. Generally the term means that non-living objects are described by human traits. In literature it is considered as a type of metaphor, referring to objects or abstractions as they have human qualities or abilities. In the modern sense it is a figure of speech with aesthetic value that is capable of describing reality in a poetic way, but definitely not describing reality in an actual way. From the point of view of the narrative theory, all descriptions are narratives, and there is no any narrative that is closer to a 'reality' in itself. This means there is no any necessary way of talking about the world, only a habitual way of talking. The narratives used in a given situation are always used because of the habit

69 There are many hypothesis' about the universe, describing it as a digital computer. The first one was Konrad Zuse in his book Calculating Space (Konrad Zuse: *Rechnender Raum;Braunschweig*: 1969.Friedrich Vieweg & Sohn). From these ideas emerged the theories of 'digital physics' and 'digital philosophy' created by Edward Fredkin. Some others who used the analogy of the computer to model the universe are: Stephen Wolfram, Juergen Schmidhuber, Gerard 't Hooft.

and custom to use it, not because it is more real. There is no necessary or more real way to talk about inanimate objects. If an object - like colors, ideas or physical things - is described in a way that it is endowed with certain qualities and feelings, or personified as it can accomplish actions, then it is just one type of narrative style among the many. Even if it is not common now in the daily language and seems impossible in the scientific language, that does not mean that it can have role in poetics only. And poetics in the modern sense, mainly understood as a tool of entertainment, that can not be effectively used in descriptions conveying knowledge. Our point of view about this is that different types of narratives, even poetics or rhetoric, can be used to achieve certain desired effects, and the rational descriptions have no exclusive right to describe reality or truth. The current dominant position of scientific narratives are justified because of the knowledge's close connection with power that controls society. The authority chose this kind of narrative as an ultimate expression for knowledge, the same way as before the church had the authority and it rejected every narrative that contradicted with the teachings of the bible.

The other common word to describe this phenomena is the anthropomorphism. It is any attribution of human characteristics to animals or non-living things. If we accept the concept that besides the narrative there are no human or non-human characteristics in itself, then the anthropomorphism does not start with the attribution of human characteristic to non-humans but by the appearance of the notion of human itself. There is a presupposition that the human is basically separated from other parts of the world, and we just recognize it. But this is already a specific kind of narrative. What are the basic characteristics of a human? Is it the body or the mind, or the perception and feelings are included too? The human being with its body and mind opposing the world, is only one kind of description.

To see a categorical difference take the systems of the Indian Samhkya and Yoga schools as an example. These two schools are often mentioned together as Samhkya-Yoga. The Samhkya as the philosophical system and the yoga as its active, practical part. Samkhya is a dualist philosophy, it describes the universe as consisting of two eternal realities: the Purusha, the pure consciousness, and the Prakriti, the matter. They are the experiencer and the experienced, subject and object. The whole appearing world comes to be from the interaction between the two of them. The Samkhya maintains an intermingled duality between these two qualities. We have to mention that the western kind of materialism is not typical in India. That kind of thinking only sparsely can find among the

Indian philosophies. Here the distinction of spirit an matter is also different form the western way. First, the Prakriti is not a reality that is totally independent from the mind. All of its functions get to motion only for the sake of Purusha, even if not created by it. It starts to be only because of the Purusha is watching. Through association with Prakriti, the Purusha gains experience of the material existence. But besides the Purusha's basic function of observing - which means merely 'looking' - all the other mental functions are belong to the Prakriti as subtle material substances. All those mental categories and functions, as thinking, doubting, knowing and so on, are the creations of the Prakriti, and they belong to the material field. This is a fundamental difference from the western narratives. The goal of the Samkhya is to realize this situation by understanding all the false notions about the Prakriti that misunderstands itself as Purusha, the real self. This means that the Purusha sees that all that happened and happens are just the performance of the Prakriti, and from this realization the Prakriti will stop its work, as a performer leaves the stage when no one is interested in her anymore. This is the liberation for the Samhkya-Yoga. But in this sense all the knowledge and practical wisdom of the way, and even the moments of understanding and the final knowledge belongs to the Prakriti, the material side which will be abandoned in the end and not considered as real self. In this narrative the human body and thinking is not opposing but a part of nature, only the Purusha, the real mind do that.

What we would like to add to this topic, in connection with the narrative theory, is that we consider the personification as an attribute of the narrative. This means that the person-object distinction exist only inside a narrative. The world in itself neither personal nor non-personal, it comes to be like that only through the narrative. It doesn't mean that there is no difference between humans and objects, but it means that the plot of the narrative decides which element of the story can be personified. As it is a part of the storytelling, there is no any rational basis to pick up any narrative, put it in an accentuated position and treat it as the only authentic narrative in regard of the usage of personification. This can be difficult to accept at first, because we are used to think that the way of talking about persons and inanimate objects in the daily life is a descriptive process, not a creative one. But now we have to focus on the nature of the narrative as a creative process. In theory, we could use a language in limitless different ways. As far as the people around us using it in a similar way, there will be no difficulty to interact with them. And there is no any difficulty in

interacting with different parts of the world, either they are personified or non-personified. The resistance toward an unusual use of language comes from a dominant narrative which came from, as we mentioned before in chapter one, the process of colonization that tries to force only one specific instance of narrative on most cultures on Earth. This kind of narrative became the basis of the academical language and treated as the standard, normal consequently the only way to describe 'reality'. As far as we consider the reality neither personified nor non-personified, an anthropomorphic description will not add more to the world than a non-personified. It will not add an extra 'religiousness' or imaginary character to it more than any other kind of narratives. It is only a habitual use of language. If someone imagines that the personified description is actually describing reality, and it is called a delusion, then the non-personified description also should called a delusion if it is treated as truth, since the narrative is never equal with reality.

In the eyes of the academical world, if a description alters from the standard academical language then it is either treated as a merely aesthetic, 'religious' or in other cases as mere nonsense. The 'religious' nature of the narrative here would mean that the described phenomena was basically misunderstood by the observer, and because the lack of right knowledge it was endowed with attributes that it does not posses. For example, a text that describes the eclipse as an event in which Rahu the asura[70] swallows the moon or the sun, considered as mythical and religious narrative based on the lack of right knowledge of the facts. And, of course, the fact would be the narrative of the scientific description: it is an astronomical event and the reason of these phenomena is that an astronomical object is either passing into the shadow of another body or having another body pass between it and the viewer, making it temporarily obscured. The solar eclipse caused by the Moon as it is moves between the Earth and the sun. The reason of the lunar eclipse that the Moon moves into the Earth's shadow.

The general conclusion would be from comparing the Hindu narrative to the scientific, is that the former is either came from wrong knowledge of the facts, or it serves entertainment purposes only. The misunderstanding comes from the situation of opposing narratives. During the examination of a different narrative, the elements of that narrative are taken out of it context and put into the context of a different narrative. In that the same words and sentences will gain a new meaning.

70 The asuras are one kind of deities in the Hindu tradition.

In the daily experience the Sun appears as a very bright, shining 'coin' on the sky. Most of the people does not need to have any detailed descriptions about this phenomenon during their entire lifetime. Since it is a unique appearance in our lives, it is normal to have some kind of narrative about it. But the form and the details of the narrative will change in accordance with the Sun's role in our life. One with interest in astrology or astronomy will need totally different narratives to accomplish his goal. The narratives about the celestial bodies of the so called 'modern world' are making people to be engaged in the knowledge systems of, for example, astronomy or space travel. These descriptions, even they can fulfill their goal and can help human beings launch satellites into space, can not be considered as exclusive narratives in the human lives. The generally accepted answer to questions like: what is the Sun? or what is an eclipse? is always a scientific answer. To talk about the world and reality it seems it is not allowed to include other type of narratives. Our point is that a scientific narrative has place only in a scientific discourse, which is dealing with some objectives to accomplish, but not with reality per se. The misinterpretation of the many, so called 'religious' narratives actually comes from the misunderstanding of the scientific narratives: they are treated as descriptions of an objective reality.

Here we do not want to suggest that both of these narratives are equal and we can choose which one we want to accept. If we planning to launch a satellite we sure have to choose the scientific description over Rahu. But actually for the lives of the 99% of the people it would make no difference which one they use. And make no mistake, it would not increase our ignorance in any sense. There are unlimited scientific descriptions we are not aware of. For example, most of us have no knowledge about what is happening when we turn on the lights in our room. Where does the light come from? What is the light? Where does it go when we turn the lamp off? There are complex explanations in physics to describe it, but we don't have to know it. Or the lack of knowledge of what is happening in our body chemically, when we are falling in love does not make us more stupid, and does not hindrances us during the process. Knowing it and thinking about it probably would just make us less enjoying the moment. And a biological explanation would not describe how one feels. What can we think if we hear 'my body is releasing a lot of dopamine, norepinephrine and phenylethylamine'? Who never learned a lot about biology probably has no clue what does it mean. We can get much clearer picture if we hear: 'Monkeys in my heart / Are rattling their cages'[71].

71 Song from Gary Jules: Falling Awake

Nobody would think that there are actual monkeys in the heart, but these words really can convey information. The scientific language is not the best tool to describe the world out of a scientific situation. Still, there is a trend to use the scientific descriptions more and more in the daily life, forgetting about its original place, and thinking about it as the only narrative that can describe reality.

Everyone will describe the world with narratives they've learned through their lives. Seeing the world in a specific narrative in the whole life makes it very difficult, or perhaps impossible, to understand and to see the world through an other. In this case, as we were raised in the narratives of the modern world, the words of 'moon', 'sun', 'Rahu' and 'swallowing' are holding a totally different meaning. What we imagine during hearing these descriptions have nothing to do whit the point of view of the person who has only that kind of narrative. Although the language is a common medium that all of us has access, but the 'decoding' of the words will create the actual meaning.

There are numerous narratives in the modern life, even in the scientific world, that should be examined the same way as some religious descriptions. It is very possible to doubt some conventional truths, for example, there are other alternative narratives about the self nature of human beings. These narratives emphasize the selfless nature of the human beings, like the no-self teaching in Buddhism. If we examine the narratives about the self in our daily lives we also will find contradiction. In some cases we refer to the self as the whole body, for example, when we see a photo of ourselves we would say: 'that is me'. Sometimes we are talking like the body belongs to us, but it is not our whole self. Especially when we mention other, non physical characteristics, like the thinking or the mind. If we point on different parts of our body, probably we would say 'that is me, and that is me too'. But if a part of the body is severed from the body, although it will be still 'ours' but will cease to be 'us'. If it is attached back to the body it will became 'us' again.

In other cases we speak about the self as a mind and consciousness or as a self who possesses these attributes. If we are persistently looking for the nature of the self through the narratives, we will reach a point where we separated all physical and mental qualities from this self, and it is still there. The different object that we call a self do not possess attributes of a person in itself, but they became personified through the narrative.

In this sense we can say that the concept of the self born by merely anthropomorphizing non-personal components (the five skandhas in Buddhism). They never bear the attributes of an

independent self, but a continuous inner narrative describes them that way. This means the way the people act, live and form communities cam to be the way it is, because there is this deep-rooted persistent narrative that focuses on a self in the body. Since the self never has been pointed out, and probably it will never be recognized in itself, this is a perfect instance of the personification. Even if one accepts this as personification of non-personal elements - or examines the skandhas and find no self in them - this still not negates the fact that the people are able to act according to a self in their daily lives and this situation does not hindrance them at all in their daily activities. This means that it is possible to live a whole life with narrative that personifies a non-personal element in it. If in a community everyone shares the same concept, it will not cause any problems.

For a person who does not striving for a Buddhist enlightenment this description about the no-self has no much significance. If one wants to keep up with the daily routines, for example: work, shopping, cooking and even philosophizing, can do that in the narrative of a personal self, as far as the other members of the community has similar view. In the world, besides the narratives the people are producing about it, there is no any force that would limit the use of personification on any object of description.

Following this example we can see that in a culture that personifies a part of their life, either an object or the natural forces, can do it without any hindrance in their daily activities. Since the personification belongs to the structure of the narrative, it follows that the world in itself is not personal or non-personal. It is possible to describe any phenomena with personal or non-personal qualities. The only fact is that in every culture there are strong habits about the use of these two aspects of descriptions.

We have to mention an other important question the 'meaning of a word'. We consider the the word does not hold a meaning in itself but the meaning can be described by the word's usage in language. As we examined before in chapter one (with the example of 'idealism'), the meaning of a word can change in different sentences, and in different situations. This situation becomes interesting if we try to understand the meaning of words like 'gods', 'God', 'nature', 'world', 'universe' etc.

To point out the similarity of the lived experience in the case using two different words, we are going to examine the usage of the words bacteria and demon. We have to think about two different cultures, and the people living in them. One is in a 'modern' society, the other is in a shamanic tribe.

We will focus on how they describe a particular situation with a different narrative. From the point of view of an ordinary person, who has no medical or shamanic knowledge the reason and process of being sick is beyond understanding. In both cases they get a story that describes the situation, but actually their understanding of the situation is quiet the same. The most part of their understanding is how they feel, how they are living that situation. An addition to this are the different kind off narratives, but these came into focus only when there is need for a description. Even if we accept that a modern medical description of the situation is a better description, it doesn't mean that by merely using the medical terms the layman will have better knowledge about the situation. It is a fact that a person with 'modern' narrative can utter these words, and even can have some memories from elementary school studies. But untrained person will have very different associations about the word 'bacteria' from the professionals. Usually we would say that there are those invisible things or beings called 'bacterias' and they enter our body to 'feed' on it and this makes us feel uncomfortable and damages our body. This is a common, unprofessional narrative of the situation and most of the people would agree with this. But what would be the difference between this and a shamanic description? In that, the word 'bacteria' would be replaced by the word 'demon' or 'ghost'. It would sound like 'there are those invisible things or beings called 'demons' and they enter our body to 'feed' on it and this makes us feel uncomfortable and damages our body'. The basic experience of being sick is similar and the understanding of the situation is similar too. On what basis can we say that the former description is the right one and the later is wrong, when both are exactly the same, but one word? We can not say that the word 'bacteria' actually refers to something and the word 'demon' does not. It is only a reliable tenet if we are engaging in a modern, scientific narrative. The word will have meaning only in this environment. But the shamanic description is a different narrative, with different elements. It never claimed to be a scientific description. If someone use these shamanic words and places them in a scientific language of course the meaning will change. Because in the scientific language there are no reasonable meanings paired to words like 'ghost', 'demon' or 'spirit world'. The meanings will be added by association from the narratives the observer has, in this case, the people of the 'modern' world will make association with mythical stories and fairy-tales. This association is reasonable within these people's life, because this kind of words appears for them only in the narratives of stories. But for the native people the narratives with demons are not fairy-tales, and not because of their ignorance of the true facts. This is the way how

they talk about their sickness. There is no right way of talking about sickness that should everybody follow, there could be numerous different descriptions. The tendency to create only one specific kind of narrative for every situation is the oppression of cultures, and it is part of the cultural and linguistic imperialism.

Born in a culture with dominant narrative it is not easy to understand that an other description, like sickness caused by demons, is not wrong at all. When the feeling of its wrongness arises it comes from that the observer endows words with meanings that they do not posses originally. Actually the mystical, fairy-tale like descriptions are existing only in the mind of the people of the modern time. They created the myths as we understand today, and the real meaning of the natives' narratives remained unknown.

It is important to note that the approach of narrative theory does not mean that all the narratives are equally good and real. It does not mean that it is impossible to choose between them because they are representing just one reality from the numerous. The usefulness of a narrative depends on how it can fulfill the goal it has been used for. If a doctor using the scientific narrative can cure the sickness more effectively, then it is the obvious choice for treatment.

An objection could be made that the demon is a personified entity and the bacteria is not. This we can examine from two ways. First, as we described before, the personification is a tool of the narrative, there is no objectively sanctified usage of it. Talking about being sick and its reasons in a personified way is not violating any rule of communication and does not oppose with any objective reality. It only opposes the 'modern' way of talking. Second, the personified way of talking about the sickness and even about the bacterias are common in the modern life too. The success of the moder medicine lies not in the non-personal way they are talking about the sickness. It lies in the research methodology. It would be very possible to give all the medical descriptions in a personified way, even referring to ghost and demons as the causes of the disease. That would not change the whole science, it would only change the narrative about it, and probably it would effect of other narratives in our lives. But the world would go on, and the people would talk about living entities causing their sickness the same way as they are referring to themselves as entities.

Now we have to take one step forward and imagine a world where people are talking about immaterial objects (trees, rivers) or astronomical bodies (Sun, Moon) in a personified way. This would be a very possible world and these kind of anthropomorphic descriptions would neither

hindrance anybody in their daily activities, nor the improvement of scientific research. Probably the attitude toward the personified object would change, but we have to understand that the difference in what one describes in a personified and no-personified way will not render one into a group of educated or uneducated people. The two has no any connection with each other. The dominance of the non-personal descriptions in science probably related to the culture where it came from, and that culture's dominance over others. These kind of descriptions, with more personification, we can see in the Indian culture where the Ganges river is equal with the goddess Ganga and the Sun is with the god Surya. Or at least this was the main narrative before the British colonization. Now the question is that the narratives of those people who have never been participated in western education are in what way differ from the people who has both western and Indian narratives or who has only western? What kind of meanings are connected with the words they use? And what are the goals of the different narrations? It is sure that these different kind of people are using the words in a different way to describe their lives. And these descriptions play a different role in their lives. All these questions we will not answer here, we just want to show that there are many questions unanswered in the religious studies, and there is a need for a paradigm shift to understand and answer them.

With the use of extended personification different cultural habits would evolve from the present ones. The same can be seen in the attitude toward animals. During the modern times more and more people see animals in a more personal way, not only as tool. This is why the animal rights are getting more importance recently. Different narratives about animals will cause different attitude toward them. As the narrative moves toward a more personified state, then the actions regarding the animals must be much more 'humanistic'.

The same happened with human beings too. Humans treat each other the way as their narratives describes them. Some specific narratives, if they are accepted, will authorize any kind of action against the person without enough personified descriptions. It is actually a common way in warfare, even the recent times, to create a narrative that will deprive the opponent of his personal traits and using those kind of references only that will not hindrance the soldier in killing him.

An interesting change in the concept of human being happened during the 15th-16th century. To understand the historical situation better, we have to go back to 1492. In January 2nd the last remaining Muslim government, the Nasrid dynasty of the Kingdom of Granada in southern Iberia,

was defeated by the Christian Kingdoms. This was the end of the Reconquista, an almost 800 years period during the Middle Ages, fulfilling the goal to retake the Muslim-controlled areas of Al-Andalus. From this day the entire Iberian Peninsula had been brought back under Christian rule, and the conquest of the Spanish Catholic Monarchy was successful. Al-Andalus' culture was a mixture of three spiritual tradition: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But after the conquest, the Spanish catholic monarchy did not wish to keep this cultural diversity, their policy was to create one culture, with one religion and one identity. The culture meant the Spanish-Christian culture, to be a part of it one had to follow its rules, laws, and the correct religiousness. Within the following years this has been done by force, the locals were forced to convert or expelled. Although the non-Christians had a very hard time they were still considered as human beings.

An other important historical event happened in the same year, Columbus sailed out to the west. Originally he wanted to reach the Asian continent, but he set foot on one of the islands of The Bahamas. Between 1492 and 1503 he completed four round-trip voyages between Spain and the Americas. When Columbus met with the aboriginals the first time, he wrote in his journal: 'they seem to have no religion'[72]. This idea of non-religious people started a new debate about the human nature. The humanity was not a question for the Catholics if someone follows God, even if the person does it a wrong way, like Jews or Muslims. But if someone has no any, no good or bad, idea of God, that raises an other question: does that person have soul at all? And moreover is he a human being then? If someone has no religion, no soul, then that person is not different from an animal. This issue created a big debate in Europe, whether these people have soul or not. That time the authority of knowledge was the Christian church, they had the power to decide. The debate reached its peak with the famous debate between Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda[73] and Bartolomé de las Casas[74]. The Valladolid debate (1550–1551) was held in the Colegio de San Gregorio, in the Spanish city of Valladolid. Las Cases argued that the natives have souls, but they are like children, have to Christianize them. The result of the debate could have a very important economical effect. If the natives of the Americas has no soul, then it is no problem to enslave them, and even kill them. In this case they could be treated as animals. If they have soul, then this would be a sin. Even though the debate seemed very important, but it had not much real result. The natives actually were

72 Fuson (1992)
73 Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1489–1573) was a Spanish humanist, philosopher and theologian.
74 Bartolomé de las Casas (c. 1484 – 1566) was a Spanish historian, social reformer and Dominican friar.

enslaved already. And in the end of the debate, both parties declared that they had won, but neither received the desired outcome.

But this debate effected the thinking of the people, and later the ideas about indigenous people started to come back and started to fuel racist discourses[75]. This strengthened the hate about non-Christians, and later lead to new turbulences. The interesting point is that these debates are about the people's status as a person. This also shows that being a human being in appearance is not the only criteria for a personified description.

2. Personification and its Connection With the Focal Character of the Story

During the process of storytelling the story often evolves around the focal character. In the tradition sense of story it is a person, but when we treat this attribute of the story as a general characteristic of every narrative then it can be simply the focal point of the plot: 'what we are talking about'. The story will be the collection of those components that connected with the focal character, their meaning and their role will be meaningful only in relation with it. During he process of storytelling the focal charter, independently of its nature, tend to be appear in a personified way. It is a characteristic of the human understanding, the narrative more sensible by the expressions of a personified focal character. This can be generally found in different descriptions of the sciences, social and natural sciences too.[76]

This characteristic in the religious studies we mentioned before. The idea of a religion as a separate entity with its self-identity during the changes, and its attributes as expanding, evolving and mixing with other 'religions' is a good example of this. But we can find this kind of expression mode in other fields. We can see the descriptions of theory of evolution. The phrasing of many of its descriptions are talking about the evolution as it is growing limbs, shaping the body. As it would be an entity that can effect the life of beings. Tenets like, 'caused by evolution' has no actual meaning. The word evolution does not refer to an existing entity it simply names a process. It is not in causal relationship with anything. As the causality itself is not in causal relationship with anything else.

The words are not only standing for objects but for situations and connections between objects

75 Professor Ramon Grosfogual - Genocide Memorial Day 2012, Presentation
76 The personification in the scientific narratives is not accented, and often unintentional.

too. But it is a common habit to use the words in an objectifying way, and treating them as they are referring to an object in the world. For example, the causality, which has been examined in details by David Hume. If we place a word in the focal point of the narrative, then we can create various narratives that would be linguistically correct, but not necessarily having concrete meaning. Although grammatically can be totally correct to talk about the cause of causation, but logically it is incoherent.

3. Reason vs. Belief

The distinction of reason and belief is often connected to the separation of the secular from religious. The secular in this case can be an atheistic point of view. The change of meaning in the use of the word atheistic is also a good example for the extension of meaning, started from a regional idea to a global one. The atheist in the ancient time meant the rejection of the gods, not necessarily the denial of their existence. The same is true about it usage in the Christianity where an atheist meant a Godless person, who is rejecting God. In these cases the word's meaning was closer to the word 'immoral', or even with uncivilized. Later this became a word for someone who holds that God does not exist and then the denial of any deities. Recently the world usually used for one who rejects all the 'religions'. These steps are parallel with changes in the meaning of the word 'religion'. Today a religious-atheist distinction seems adequate in the language.

The so called 'religious' side is often pared with the 'believer' trait and the atheist with the rationalist. The first means believing without examination, based on authority. The second means to get knowledge through reason and observation. But this kind of concept, even though it is very common, contains a lot of fallacies. First, the idea of belief-rationality opposition is illusory. They are not the oppositions of each other. The opposition of belief is unbelief and the opposition of rationality is irrationality. Believing, or non-believing in something has nothing to do its truth value and its rationality. A belief can be rational if there is a rational way to conclude the possibility of its truth. As a non-belief, or doubt, can be irrational if there is no any reason to doubt it.

Now if we put away the question whether it is possible or not to attain real knowledge and focus only on the human thinking and knowledge, we can conclude that in a specific situation the

rationality depends on the person's capacity for reasoning and his background knowledge. The background knowledge gives the basis for the reasoning, it is not the object of the inquiry. Because it is accepted as it is, we can call it 'belief'. A belief can be based on reason but not necessarily. Lot of believes are based on customs and habits. A person has no ways to re-examine all his believes, because there is no belief-free or ideology-free standpoint. So the original belief-rationality opposition can be rephrased as an opposition between belief based on custom and belief based on rational inference.

Recently there are more and more debates between 'religion' and atheism in the west. This usually means debates between a Christian and an atheist thinker. A common standpoint for atheists to argue against certain belief in Christianity, pointing out that these have no any rational base. The purpose is to show that it is totally possible to explain any phenomena in the world without God. The arguments are often based on scientific explanations used to argue against daily views, hold by lay people. These kind of arguments are often sound very convincing, but they are carrying some mistakes. For example, take a very common argument against the 'religions', which says that people in every different religions are believing in something, the only difference is what do they believe in. If one born in a specific culture, will have believes according to that culture's teachings. If one born in India, then he will be a Hindu, and will believe in Vishnu, in China will believe in the Buddha, and in a Muslim country he will believe in Allah. And it is true of the past too. In the ancient Greece people believed in Zeus, the Vikings in Odin etc. The actual belief of a 'religious' person is only depend on mere accident where he or she was born and grow up. There is no any particular reason to place one in front of the other.

This kind of argumentation has several fallacies. First, it is does not take account of the atheist's belief. The atheist also have a belief, for example in the existence of a self-dependent nature. In this way it is not possible to separate the religious belief from the non-religious. Second, this is also a typical Christian categorization, based on the idea of believing in God. Probably the relationship with a one, ultimate God for eternal heaven is totally different from a relationship with one god from a pantheon, hoping for temporal, worldly advantage only. In fact the previously mentioned 'gods' in different cultures probably has not much in common, and they are forming a group only, because of a false description. A respectful attitude toward Odin probably has much more common with a warriors respect for his king, than a priests penitence. And third, even if we accept that these

'gods' are one and one in a line, it does not follows that none of them is really existent.

The rationality is not equal with objectivity or science. There are a lot of things that are rationally accepted but can not be proven by science. For example: logical and mathematical truths can not be proven, science presupposes these. Trying to prove them by science would be an arguing in circle. Metaphysical truths are also beyond the reach of science, like the existence of others besides the self. It can not be proven scientifically that there is anything existing besides the self mind (solipsism). Ethical statements are beyond the reach of science, as well as aesthetic judgments. And finally science itself can not be proven by science, and even some elements in scientific theories, like in the theory of relativity that the speed of light is constant.

4. Ceremonies and Rituals

The rituals and ceremonies are deeply interwoven with our daily lives. Most of the times we even don't recognize them, because the meaning of the ritual is not separated from its performance. We can define the ritual as a set of actions that does not produce but hold or convey meaning. They are holding a symbolic value. Usually they can not be understood without knowing the particular ritual, or a similar one that can imply the meaning. Without making any distinction of the religious-secular it is more fruitful to research the general ritualistic habits of human being. Taking out of context, forgetting about its cultural importance we can see that most of the ritualistic behavior has nor real rational basis in itself. They have rational basis in a given culture. For example there are no such things in reality as birthday, or family or graduation. These formation are the product of certain cultures. When some people decide to live their lives together forming a family, the idea itself does not represent a hidden reality. It does not make more sense to make a ritual to form a family than performing a ritual in the hope for a better hunting.

5. Devotion and Worship

The devotion and the worship is a general character of the human beings. Here we would like to approach this subject as an inner drive in all humans, focusing on its general nature. Since scientifically it is meaningless to state what kind of objects, people or ideas are worth or not worth worshiping, in the religious studies we should avoid to characterize this human behavior based on its objects. We should treat the phenomena of worship and devotion always the same way, whether it is tending toward a yogi, a politician or a pop star.

At the same time we have to be careful to not mix up the concepts of devotion as an inner characteristics with an outside act that can seem to be its outer manifestation as worship. Bowing down in front of a person or object can be worshiping and a sign of devotion, but not necessarily. It can be a sign of respect, even merely a respectful greeting. Bowing down in front of respected or higher ranked people was a common practice in the ancient times. It is still exists in Asia, although less and less. In Japan or Korea it is still a habit. But in the west, for a long time now, it is not considered as a respected act. Bowing down in front of others, besides God, is a form of humiliation, thus can not often seen in the western countries. It is understandable so when the early travelers met this kind of action during their trips in Asia, they considered as an act of worship in most of the cases.

But this can be seen from an other perspective too. Bowing down in front of a Buddha statute can be considered as an act of respectful greeting. For this we can lean on the Buddhist scriptures, where it is mentioned many times that during that time this was the exact form to greet the Buddha. To understand why people are performing a greeting in front of a Buddha statue, long after the death of the historical Buddha, we have to look into the world view of the people of that culture. One reason can be the practice that helps to get rid of the arrogance. By showing respect to someone who really deserves it one can practice to extend this humility towards others as well. On the other hand, and this is more important, is the teachings of the law of causality. It means all the actions are bringing forth results according to them. Repeated actions in this life will be continued in the next life too. If one often bows down in front of a Buddha statue, then one will continue to do this in future lives, which means one can get into an environment where the Buddha's legacy is there. And finally, by pretending repeatedly that one is showing respect to the Buddha, according to the laws of

causality there will come a time when one can do this in front of a real Buddha.

From this we can see that the reason to do seemingly similar actions in different cultures not necessarily has similar inner motive. The reasons of worshiping in a Christian temple and in a Buddhist temple can be totally different. They have been put into the same category only because for an outsider, with a Judeo-Christian background these actions seems similar. They have been categorized using one particular narrative system, hereby distorted in meaning.

If we are focusing on the action, we can see similar deeds in the so called 'secular' world too. It is not uncommon to see total devotion toward modern pop stars up to the extent of building small sanctuaries for them and actually worshiping them by fans. It is common to object that there is a difference between a deity and human being, because the former is transcendent and the later is worldly. We examine in details the meaning of the transcendent in a later part. Here we just want to mention briefly that the category of transcendent, as it is the object of the religious studies, does not exist outside of it, only in the researchers narratives, and philosophy. But for common people, which means the majority of people who are not philosophers or academics, the abstract, transcendental world does not exist. The world of deities belongs to reality, not to a world away from it. In fact, usually there is much more interaction between a deity and a worshiper then between a pop star and a fan. In this sense an untouchable star is much more transcendent then a deity that would give signs or even talk to some people.

To develop a coherent research methodology, first we have to make clear distinction between actions with similar outside appearances, realizing that their similarity might arise from our fixed narrative categories, and does not exist without it. Second, we should abandon the distinction between artificial categories of the 'religious' and 'secular' devotion and worship. Praying as it is seen in the religious studies is modeled from the praying for God in Christianity. If someone is praying to Mazu, asking for some worldly advantage, it is much more closer to an action like someone is asking a rich or influential person for help, than praying for salvation to an eternal God. On the other hand a feeling of remorse from breaking the law of God has much more in common with a 'non-religious' persons remorse, who believes in his community's moral law as fundamental and acted against it. For both of them an inner attitude toward 'salvation' would be very similar.

6. Sacred and Treasured

What is important for people, let it be an object, action or idea is different from culture to culture. The notion that some of these are not merely very important but even holy or sacred, can not be shown outside of the academical research. These words have been created from Christian concepts, and do not represent universal values. We can say that there are values, ideas, object and actions that are held in high value in different communities, but we can not make an objective classification about real high values. Someone can value some pieces of hair from a deceased guru, an other person can value the hair of a long lost love. Probably there would be some time for both of them when they would take these 'artifacts' and perform some ritualistic actions that would release memories and feelings. And in the sense of research they should be treated equally. What is important or respected in one culture can be non-important or even fearful in an other.

There is an interesting example given by a psychologist, psychotherapist Andrew Feldmar[77]. He mentioned a case during one of his lectures[78]. A family gave him a call and asked for help, because as they said, their seventeen years old daughter "went mad". For the question what exactly had happened, they answered that the girl doesn't do anything whole day just sitting and starring at the wall. He asked them 'Is it a problem?'. The family's answer was: 'Yes, because it is not something that a seventeen years old girl should do'. To know what is really happening he visited the family, and his first observation was that the whole family was just sitting there and staring at the television. He felt a strong controversy here: why is it better to stare at the TV then stare at the wall? He tried to explain to the family that in some cultures, like among Zen Buddhists, those people who can sit silently and starring at a wall for several hours are well respected. After he talked with the girl he found out that she can talk or move if she wants, but she doesn't want to. Mr. Feldmar thought it has nothing wrong with that, but he was sure if not him but an other psychiatrist were came there, then they would have taken her away diagnosed as catatonic.

In the research, our goal should be to collect all the 'sacred' and 'treasured' object and actions in every cultures, based on the human attitude toward them, not based on the object itself. After the collected data there can be a comparison to find out in different cultures what can be treated as

77 Mr. Feldmar is known about his non-traditional ways in psychology. He is strongly against the 'labeling' of people and diseases, and - except some rare cases – the use of medication in treatment.

78 'The Rainbow of mind states' (A tudatállapotok szivárványa),lecture, 17th September 1992 at the university of 'Kossuth Lajos Tudományegyetemen' Debrecen, Hungary.

sacred and what is not. In this comparison however we should avoid value judgments.

7. Using the Word 'Religion' in the Daily Life

In the daily language it seems when we name something 'religious' then we really put additional information to it. But if we examine specific situations, then we will see that in most of the cases there is no much more information added, only this makes us stop asking further questions about the subject. By the label 'religious' we can put the labeled person or act in a category that is 'known' and does not require further inquire. It can give same directions, but will not give any specific answer.

For example, we meet somebody and we find out about him that he is a vegetarian. We ask the question why, and he answers is 'because of my religion', or to be more specific, he could says 'because I am a Buddhist'. Probably we will stop asking further, because it seems we got the answer to our question. But what did we really get to know? Do we really know why is that person vegetarian? Only because there is this common idea that 'some religious people don't eat meat because of their religion' it does not meant it really has concrete meaning. Actually it does not contains more information then the statement 'some people do not eat meat because they have some reasons not to eat'. Even if we focus only on the reason being a 'Buddhist' it does not tell us much about the reasons. Actually, to be a vegetarian is in not mandatory in every Buddhist traditions. Monks in Sri Lanka, for example, can eat meat. And if somebody is really vegetarian, because of the teachings of the Buddha, it also can be from numerous reasons.

It can be that the whole family follows the commandments of the Buddha, and growing up in that environment, one who actually has no interest in it will be vegetarian to. If someone from childhood eats vegetarian food, it is not easy to digest meat, so it is probable that the person will be vegetarian for his whole life, even if he gets out of that environment.

Someone can be vegetarian because believes that the Buddha was a supreme being, and accepts any commandment because of trust, even if the meaning, the reason why to do it, is not clear.

An other person can became vegetarian because of studying the teachings and feels that there is a reason not to eat meat. For one person the reason can be an understanding that the animals are sentient beings too. They have feelings and thoughts, so treating them like mere food, or ignoring their suffering is unacceptable. Similar, but a slightly different idea, if someone thinks that not only

the situation is bad, by making them suffer, but the killing is a vile act too. From this reasons he or she wants to avoid to get involved with any action that connected to killing. Because the meat that people eat comes from slaughtering animals, the only way to not get involved in this to refuse eating meat.

But for an other person the reason can be to avoid collecting bad karma that would doom him or her to lower rebirth. In this case the concern is not the suffering of others but the suffering of oneself. The reason, 'being a Buddhist', is the same but the actual reason is quite different.

An other reason could be to do not make negative karmic relations with other beings. If a Buddhist have intentions to be a great teacher or bodhisattva in the future, he or she has to make good relationship with every sentient beings. This is important because every meeting with other beings will leave an impact and will come back in future lives. Since the meat is nothing else but the dead bodies of slaughtered animals, by eating them a very negative karmic relationship arises.

And surely there are many more reasons. The former mentioned five reasons are quite different in their nature. Sometimes the attitude toward the vegetarianism can be so different that the thinking of the two 'Buddhist' person is actually opposing each other. Like in the case when one worries about the suffering of the animal and the other worries about the suffering of the self because of karmic retribution. Although the former person probably loves, or at least cares about animals, the later even can hate and despise them. This two people's personalities, and their thought in this matter would be totally different, but if they answer our question of 'why are you vegetarian?' with 'because I believe in Buddhism' we will stop asking further. The understanding we get from labeling them 'Buddhist' or 'religious' does not really gets us closer to their real reasons.

It might appear though, that a 'religious' reason for vegetarianism is different from other, for example, health or hygienic reasons. Lets examine this in details, and give two descriptions of two different kinds of people. The first is vegetarian, because he believes that not eating meat is good for him. Avoiding eating meat reduces the chance to digest harmful or poisons materials, consequently he will be healthier. Being healthier will lead to less sickness therefore to less suffering in the future.

The second person is vegetarian, because he also believes that not eating meat is good for him. Avoiding eating meat reduces the chance to collect bad karma, consequently he will have better chance for a better life, for a healthy life for example. Less bad karma will lead to less problems, less sickness therefore less suffering in the future.

Both of them are believing in something that makes them to follow certain rules regarding their eating habits, and they are expecting pretty much similar beneficial result. The second person is called 'religious' for his belief, the first one is not. This kind of situation becomes more complicated if a reason is 'religious' and hygienic or health reason in the same time. Like in the case of Muslims who don't eat pork because it prohibited in their 'religious' practice, it is against Allah's will and it is considered an 'unhygienic' animal. In this case it is not easy to say that it is merely a 'religious' commandment.

The situation is similar in the case of circumcision. The scientists usually agree on that the reason for circumcision in the ancient times was hygienic. But for the Jews it is the symbol of covenant with God. Stating any of these actions as 'religious', gives some kind of orientation only because the common use of the word in the daily life let us know what in what kind of situations we say 'religious' but it does not mean that there is an underlying principle behind them.

An other interesting example is the use of the concepts of religious war, religious fanaticism or religious terrorism. The recent years these kind of descriptions are very common, and make people think that calling some actions the result of religious terrorism has much more meaning than calling something simply terrorism. What is exactly the difference between a terrorist and a religious terrorist? What is the difference between a religious war and a simple war? In the modern day propaganda the word 'religious' added to the description of certain actions, especially accomplished by Muslims, makes the people believe that they understand the reason of it, therefor no need to looking for further reasons. In this case the alleged reason for 'religious Muslims' is that their religion, or the interpretation of their religion, is justifies for them the accomplishment of harmful deeds. In this sense the 'religious' gets a negative meaning and implies a kind of barbaric or uneducated mentality. It suggests that if these people were not religious then they would have acted in a different way. But these kind of descriptions are misleading, because they are not conveying any more information then other explanations, such as 'for some reason' or 'because he believed he is doing the right thing'.

If we examine the narratives of the propagandas 'war on terror', 'war for democracy' or the spreading of the idea of the free market, we can see that these narratives are not really different from the religious ones. Believing that people should follow some 'universal' laws as 'democracy' or 'free market' and forcing other countries to believe in it makes it a religious war too. According to a

narrative approach there is no difference between spreading Christianity or spreading democracy.

8. Alternative Narratives in Different Cultures

Besides the alternative narratives could be produced in the wester-style academia we feel important that there should be alternatives offered by different countries and cultures. It is very plausible to ask that why use European categories in a non-European medium? Why should cultures of the Orient describe themselves by the narratives of the Occident? And why should they see themselves through the eyes of the west? We can see now, that the reason why this happened is the dominant ideology during the colonial times, by the oppression that forced the colonized cultures to abandon their narratives and learn the oppressor's. It did not stopped with withdrawal of the colonizing forces, the effect on culture was already significant, and the ideological control of these cultures is still continuing by the process of neo-colonializm.

This situation has been recognized before, in the beginning of the 20th century an Indian social scientist, professor Benoy Kumar Sarkar[79] already started to criticize the modern social sciences accusing it with false representation. He was critical with the Asian academics too, he considered them as victims to the "fallacious sociological methods and messages of the modern West, to which the postulate of an alleged distinction between the Orient and the Occident is the first principle of science."[80]

Later more and more criticizer followed him, but still not enough to make a change in the general academical approaches. The right to represent other cultures does not belong to the 'modern world' only. In fact, most of the times it has been made by a very subjective way, focusing only on some parts of the cultures. Usually lot of attention has been payed regarding the so called 'mystical' element of the east. The mystical feeling arise in the mind of the observer as he interprets the information, and places of an other culture by his own narrative. This is how the idea of the 'mystical east' born. The interesting thing is that for the people of east, the west, especially Europe, is considered mystical. But there are many other sides of a culture, which has not bean researched or

79 Benoy or Binoy Kumar Sarkar (1887–1949) He was graduated from the University of Calcutta in 1905. He had degrees in both English and history. From 1925 he was a lecturer, from 1947 he became a professor and head of the Department of Economics at the University of Calcutta.

80 Quote from Syed Farid Alatas: Why Teach European Social Science to Asians; In *Kamiriithu* – newsletter p.3

documented in detail. For some reasons most of the eastern countries, such as India, China or the Arab world, has been characterized in some kind of religious or spiritual way. In fact, these countries originally were very developed in their knowledge systems.

The academical imperialism means that there is only one dominant way for academical narratives. It holds that there is one, universal thinking way, and the academia is the authority over it. This way of thinking creates a straight line of knowledge improvement, which means that the accumulation of knowledge can only happen by achieving one level after the other in a straight line. There are people staying on different levels of knowledge, and by studying, anyone can get from a lower level to a higher one. It does not contains any possibility for branches of knowledge-improvement in other directions. For example, a physicist who wants to understand how the universe came to existence, the main way to achieve this is through the practice of physics and other related science. It is not possible to put away all the accumulated knowledge in these fields and chose a very different path for knowledge, for example by studying the Upanishads.

The universalism of knowledge has a consequence: the knowledge is perceived as something that can be measured. This will place not only people, but cultures and countries on a scale, and creates the notion of intellectual inequality between them. This will make it right to impose one cultures ideology and narratives upon an other culture, even on the whole world, by saying that is of a higher value. Needless to say, in our approach, this kind of description of knowledge lacks any rational basis.

We do not want to suggest that every people has equal knowledge. But we want to point out that there is no universal scale for what kind of knowledge is adequate. The scale that shows the quality difference between the numerous knowledge systems and narratives are created by the ruling power. In this way what considered as right knowledge is always decided by a ruling class. The problem with this is that every class of people have their own ideology and agenda, consequently the right knowledge will be defined in accordance of their goals. The authority of right knowledge can have many forms according to time and place. It can be the church, the academia, the state or a political group etc. As the modern academia is the exclusive source of knowledge, the school system and education is the tool for keeping alive the dominant narratives. If someone grows up without being educated in such an environment, even if the person has rich and sufficient knowledge about the world, he or she still will be considered as uneducated or even barbaric. This kind of attitude is

parallel with the early European, Christian way of thinking where all the non-Christian nations were considered barbarians.

This system with its expansion through the neo-colonization have been a major factor in destroying the diversity of knowledge. The process of learning and understanding has been forced to a narrow path distorting pluralism, equating understanding with acquiring information. The ways how the information can be acquired has been narrowed down.

The closer examination of the ideas of cultural relativism, on the one side, helps to understand the nature of narratives in different cultures, and on the other side shows the nature of the religious studies too. Cultural relativism is a respond to the ethnocentrism which pervades the modern academical world. In order to understand what ethnocentrism really is, we have to examine its manifestations on different levels. In a very general definition we can say it is a tendency to view alien groups or cultures from the perspective of one's own. But in this form it is too general, probably it is true for every human perspective. There are other, more specific layers of it. An other meaning is a belief in the intrinsic superiority of one's own culture, or sub-culture which is often accompanied by feelings of dislike for other cultures. This can be the source of racial, sexual or religious discrimination. In this form it is an element of common life, but not typical in the academical world. Getting one step away from a highly negative discrimination we can say that ethnocentrism is judging another culture solely by the values and standards of one's own culture[81]. The ethnocentric individual will judge other groups relative to his or her own particular ethnic group or culture, especially with concern to language, behavior, customs, and religion. These ethnic distinctions and subdivisions serve to define each ethnicity's unique cultural identity.

81 Omohundro (2008)

Conclusion

During the former hundred pages, although we started out from the religious studies, we touched numerous subjects. Most of them are closely connected with the topic of religion, but they are reaching toward not only to the social sciences but the academical studies generally.

In some point we would like to make our point of view more clear, to avoid some misunderstanding. With the elimination of the religious-secular distinction, our intention is not to secularize the different religious traditions. Or, we could say, no more then 'religionize' the secular world. All we wanted to show is that the generally described 'religious' phenomena are the product of a specific narrative only, and there can not be found any 'objective' distinctive features in them. We do not deny that there are certain experiences that are fundamentally different from the common experience, those are usually categorized as mystical experiences. But about this we have to realize, that the religion can not be defined by these mystical experiences. If we were to do so, that would exclude more then 99% of the so called 'religious' people, who never had any this kind of experience, and most of them never even heard of it. The objects of the research usually are not these specific situations but the numerous other activities. Even if we were to focus on the mystical experiences, it is important to note, that the word 'mystical' often belongs to the narrative of the researcher, not to its subject. There are many experiences in other cultures that although characterized as special or not common, but these would not lift them from the natural category for them. And to do a complete inquiry we should look for these kind of specific experiences in the 'secular' world too.

We also have to mention that this paper does not want to discredit the scientific methodologies used in the religious studies, even less the scientific methodology generally. In the religious studies the problem is not with the methodology but with the categories. In our opinion, a revision of the categories and definitions based on the same methodology would lead a more fruitful research. What we have tried to do in the former chapters is to apply the same methodologies and philosophical inquire to those phenomena that are usually avoided by the general research.

And at last, we do not want to disparage the importance of those phenomena that are the objects of the religious studies. We believe that these are very important aspect of the human life, but in

order to correctly understand them we have to be opened to several, different narratives from different cultures. The dominance of a specific kind of descriptive style, based on one cultural background, will not facilitate the understanding but limit it.

We really hope that the academics of different cultural environments will find their own way to describe their own cultures, own history and religious life. They could find their own ways of narrating different aspects of their lives, not only using European-Christian based categories and descriptive styles. Moreover it would be very stimulating for the academia if there were descriptions of the whole world by the categories of different cultures. There should be narratives that shows who was considered a yogi from all over the world from a Hindu point of view, or who was a shengren (聖人) according to the Chinese descriptions. It is not acceptable that in the academical language we can use only categories of European origin, such as *philosopher* or *saint*, to describe the people of the whole world. These new descriptions would create new divisions of the whole human life, expanding the possibility for understanding. This important work still needs to be done, and the academics from all countries of the world have to step out and reconstruct the world's intellectual diversity.

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