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RELIGIJA KAIP TRANSCENDENCIJOS APREIŠKIMO IŠRAIŠKA

Religion as an Expression of the Revelation of Transcendence

SUMMARY

The purpose of the article is to analyse the concept of religion as an expression of the Transcendence manifested to man, which is subject to different ways of conceptualisation. The article is in three parts. The first presents different ways of understanding transcendence (“above” and “below” the world, external and internal, vertical and horizontal, absolute being and the act of transcending human nature). The second part considers its nature (mysterious nothing, ultimate reality, moral value). The third part deals with the question of the revelation of transcendence (difference between revelation and manifestation, revelation in nature and history, the dialectical nature of revelation, its cipher and sign character).

SANTRAUKA

Straipsnio tikslas – išanalizuoti religijos, kaip žmogui pasireiškiančios transcendencijos, sampratą, kurią galima įvairiai konceptualizuoti. Šį tekstą sudaro trys dalys. Pirmojoje pristatomi skirtingi transcendencijos supratimo būdai („virš“ pasaulio ir „po“ pasauliu, išorinis ir vidinis, vertikalūs ir horizontalūs, absoliuti būtis ir žmogiškosios prigimties peržengimo aktas). Antrojoje aptariama jos prigimtis („paslaptįs niekas“, galutinė tikrovė, moralinė vertė). Trečiojoje dalyje nagrinėjamas transcendencijos apreiškimo klausimas (parodomas skirtumas tarp apreiškimo ir pasireiškimo, išskiriamas apreiškimas gamtoje ir istorijoje, analizuojama dialektinė apreiškimo prigimtis, nusakomas jo šifro bei ženklų pobūdis).

Religion is usually defined as a system of beliefs and practices relating to the relationship between the sacred, variously conceived, and the individual. It finds its expression in doctrinal, cultic

and social dimensions. However, it is important to bear in mind the problems associated with the precise definition of religion and the objective criteria for distinguishing religious phenomena from

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: religija, transcendencija, Dievas, galutinė tikrovė, apreiškimas.

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other types of phenomena. Accordingly, some have proposed that the term 'religion' be abandoned altogether as a misleading, unnecessary and deforming concept (Smith 1964: 50).

As the German theologian Joseph Ratzinger notes, the concept of religion as a general name for man's relationship to the Transcendent has emerged in modern times. However, it is, in his view, a problematic generalisation and is based on questionable assumptions (Ratzinger 2005: 42). However, it seems

that, leaving aside the difficulties mentioned by Ratzinger, religion can be understood precisely as an expression of the Transcendence manifested to man.

The following analyses, mainly of a philosophical nature, deal with this understanding of religion. They consist of three main parts. In the first, different ways of understanding transcendence will be shown. In the second part, attention will be paid to its nature. In the third, the question of the manifestation of Transcendence is addressed.

UNDERSTANDING TRANSCENDENCE

Transcendence (Latin: *transcendere* – to transcend) is primarily a philosophical term with many different meanings. It is sometimes used interchangeably with the word 'transgression'. On the one hand, according to the Polish historian of philosophy Piotr Gutowski, the two words have a common meaning in that they refer to go beyond some kind of limitation, while on the other hand they are fundamentally different. The former, however, seems to have positive and religious overtones, while the latter is pejorative and anti-religious. Transcendence occurs only in the case of conscious entities and consists in an improvement of the initial state. Transcendence also occurs in unconscious entities and can result in a worsening of the initial situation. The object of transcendence can be the supernatural world to which man is directed by supernatural forces. Transgression takes place within the natural world by means of natural forces. Its aim is to set new boundaries

or to eliminate any boundaries considered oppressive (Gutowski 2020: 315–320). Thus, religion generally uses the concept of transcendence to characterise its main object, which is the object of worship and the point of reference of human existence.

Transcendence can furthermore be understood, in the view of the philosopher of religion Karol Tarnowski, not only as the transcendence of man towards supernatural being, i.e. existing above the world, but also as the discovery of the depths of reality, i.e. something existing below its phenomenal sphere (Tarnowski 2017: 388, 404–413, 431–439). Transcendence can be discovered not only in isolation from the world, but also in its depths as the foundation of being. Transcendence would thus be present in the immanence of reality.

Transcendence thus takes place, according to some, in two fundamental directions: external and internal. The first is directed towards a higher being to

whom a unique value is ascribed and whose good is placed above one's own. The second direction takes place within the person and involves processes of self-realisation, self-improvement or personal development (Step 2009: 130). Transcendence is thus relational. It presupposes reference to some external instance or human interiority. With external transcendence in mind, its two types are generally distinguished: ontic, i.e. going beyond the natural mode of existence by a given being, and epistemic, i.e. crossing the human cognitive categories.

Religion researcher Meerten Berend ter Borg emphasises that the God-directed vertical transcendence has now been replaced by a horizontal one aimed at improving the world (Borg 2008b: 230, 236). It finds its expression, according to ter Borg, among other things, in man's transcending of his biological nature and his current existential situation. Man, then experiencing the finiteness and inadequacy of existence, seeks to increase the quality of his life by giving it meaning (Borg 2008a: 129). The search for and making of meaning is thus an elementary form of human transcendence and an essential means of ensuring existential security. Sources of meaning can include religion.

However, as ter Borg emphasises, not all meanings are religious in nature. For this is determined by their sanctioning by God, whose existence must first be recognised by man (Borg 2008a: 130–131). For the source of meanings is not only the explicit forms of religion, which are only the tip of the iceberg, but also its implicit forms (Borg 2008b: 230–233, 235, 237). It seems that these can include not

only different varieties of spirituality in the broadest sense, but also science or art.

The German sociologist Thomas Luckmann also emphasises the role of the anthropological fact of man's transcendence of his biological nature. It is the basis of religion both in its non-specific form, i.e. a worldview that is a certain configuration of a moral universe and a system of meanings, and in its specific form, i.e. an institution with its doctrine, rituals and organisation (Luckmann 2011: 118–139, 148). Transcendence is thus a universal element and need of the human person that can find expression precisely in religion.

Following the thought of the Belgian philosopher of religion Louis Dupré, one would therefore have to conclude that divine transcendence has now been replaced by human transcendence of the self (Dupré 1994: 16). Consequently, the place of transcendence has become human. It is therefore necessary to go beyond object-oriented thinking in its search and to value the role of subjective insights (Mech 2000: 9–15).

According to the French philosopher of religion Yves Ledure, however, religion is grounded in and oriented towards transcendence. He notes in parallel that there is a certain tension between transcendence and its human representations. They therefore demand a constant contestation by the human facing the divine mystery (Ledure 1989: 26–28). It seems that Ledure has in mind here not so much transcendence understood as the act of man crossing his nature (horizontal transcendence), but rather as a certain being existing independently of him (vertical transcendence). It appears

first and foremost as an unfathomable mystery that demands a constant reconstruction of human conceptual and imaginative schemes about itself.

Such transcendence is thus identified with God, who provides an answer to the human need to cross the self and enables insights into the depths of his reality. However, the transition from transcendent desires to the existence of the tran-

scendent object of these desires is, according to some, problematic (Cottingham 2019: 791–792). For, on the one hand, its existence is not obvious to humans, while on the other hand, there is a lack of incontrovertible evidence in favour of it. The existence of the divine Transcendence is assumed in religion by faith, through which man strives to discover its being and establish a relationship with it.

NATURE OF TRANSCENDENCE

It is therefore worth asking the question: is any closer characterisation of this Transcendence possible? It would seem so. All the more so since, given their inadequacy and imperfection, various attempts are made to describe it.

The German philosopher of religion Bernhard Welte, for example, identifies Transcendence with the mysterious nothingness that is infinite and unconditional. Although it has a personal dimension, it is something much more unfathomable. Transcendence manifests itself as the power that gives being and meaning to the world and to man (Welte 1980: 44–51; Welte 1997: 83, 86–95, 104–108, 134–137, 165–168, 173–178). Transcendence would thus be some hidden reality, probably of a spiritual nature, existing beyond all categories and eluding human cognition. It would, however, be the source of being and the meaning of individuals.

Spanish theologian Raimundo Panikkar refers to Transcendence as an indivisible cosmotheandric reality. It is represented in different symbols and under different names (Panikkar 1981: 19–23, 26–27, 29–30). Transcendence is thus a

hard-to-imagine hybrid of divine, human and cosmic elements that condition each other to an indivisible whole.

However, the British philosopher of religion John Hick identifies Transcendence with some ultimate reality that makes itself known in various forms. It goes beyond, in his view, all manifestation and definition because it is qualitatively and contentually richer. It can only be experienced partially and inadequately (Hick 1989: 343–361). Similarly, the Canadian philosopher of religion John L. Schellenberg speaks of the Transcendent as an ultimate reality, larger and deeper than the physical world. It is not a personal being, but has three fundamental dimensions: metaphysical, axiological and soteriological. In the metaphysical sense, it is not only distinct from natural facts, but is also their foundation. In the axiological sense, it embodies the highest value. In the soteriological sense, it has to do with the perfection of man. Triple Transcendence is minimal in content and can be described in various ways (Schellenberg 2009: 19, 105, 241–250; Schellenberg 2017: 18–20,

122). This concept is called *ultimism*. It is based on the assumption of the existence of some transcendent reality of unknown nature, which is described differently in various religious traditions. In this situation, we would be dealing with religious relativism and cognitive scepticism. Relativism would be related to the lack of a single concept of Transcendence in the different religions, and scepticism to the cognitive limitations of man. The connecting element between the different spiritual traditions and providing a starting point for further research would be the existence of this ultimate reality, which would receive diverse specifications in the different religions.

The American philosopher of religion William Christian considers the asseveration of a certain transcendent reality, more important than the whole universe, to be the underlying religious belief. He identifies this reality with the highest good and the highest value towards which human action should be oriented (Christian 1964: 60). Derived from this base belief are beliefs concerning the structure of being, values and human life (Christian 1987: 41–50, 161–170). It seems that the transcendent reality as the highest good and the highest value is here reduced mainly to the moral dimension.

Transcendence is viewed in a similar way by the Polish philosopher Janusz Salamon. He is the author of the concept of agatheism, in which he identifies transcendent reality as religiously conceived with the ultimate good as the transcendental condition of human axiological consciousness. The agatheistic thesis is, in his view, assumed in most religious traditions and forms the basis of more

specific beliefs. The various religious belief systems are the products of human axiological consciousness, always oriented towards some kind of good, and of agatological imagination, seeking an optimal conceptualisation of the nature of the absolute good. Its existence is postulated because it is the source and goal of all being, and the foundation of human transformation. At the same time, Salamon emphasises that there are both religious and non-religious ways of conceiving the ultimate good (Salamon 2015: 201–207; Salamon 2017: 116–123). Salamon's position above seems to be inspired, on the one hand, by Plato's conception of divinity as the idea of the Good as the source and foundation of all being, and, on the other, by Kant's attempt to shift the issue of God from the realm of theoretical to practical reason. The result of the above conception, however, is a pluralistic interpretation of transcendence and of religion itself. Instead, it provides a good starting point for a broader debate concerning the nature of the highest good.

On the basis of the above attempts to characterise transcendence, it is possible to conclude that it has three fundamental dimensions: cosmological (the ultimate reason for the existence and order of the world), aesthetic (the experience of the beauty of the world) and moral (the existence of eternal values, demanding a human response) (Cottingham 2019: 793–803). It is worth noting, moreover, that Transcendence can have both a non-personal and a personal form. In the first case, it represents a mysterious foundation of being and values or a force at work in the cosmos. In the second, it

is a personal God with whom man wishes to enter into a relationship and an existential dialogue.

However, the German sociologist Thomas Luckmann points out that a certain turn in the understanding of the nature of transcendence is now being noticed. Indeed, human beings are moving from large transcendence through medium one to small transcendence (Luckmann 2003: 285). Elsewhere, he will explain that the term “large transcendence” is used to describe other re-

alities, sometimes impossible to experience, coming to the fore in dreams, ecstasies, meditations and death, “medium” – other people, and “small” – the spatio-temporal everyday life (Luckmann 2011: 196–197). In modern times, therefore, we would be dealing with a kind of transcendence without God and its various forms existing within the boundaries of the world. For transcendence occurs in the immanence of the world, and the place of the supernatural divine being is taken by natural being.

REVELATION OF THE TRANSCENDENCE

The German religious thinker Paul Tillich notes that religion is the way in which revelation has been received. Revelation always takes place in a concrete reality and is addressed to a specific recipient (Tillich 1994: 76–77). Thus, one can come to believe that the mysterious Transcendence reveals itself in a certain way to man or the community as recipient in a concrete natural or historical reality.

As an aside, two important points should be noted. Firstly, a distinction is sometimes made between revelation and manifestation. We deal with revelation in the case of personal communication between God and man. Manifestation occurs at the moment of the unveiling of a supernatural force in nature through cosmic symbols (e.g. a tree, a rock). Secondly, the word ‘revelation’ is a typically Christian expression. Therefore, when speaking of non-Christian religions, two other terms should be used: “manifestation” to denote God’s external activity in nature and “illumination” to

denote His internal activity in man (Dajczer 1989: 180–181). God’s manifestation would thus be object-oriented and external, whereas revelation would be more subject-oriented and internal.

Welte emphasises that in the events of revelation, the divine mystery takes on a concrete and finite shape, but at the same time goes beyond all finiteness, retaining its transcendence. Thus, according to Welte, we deal with a dialectic of revelation. It manifests itself in two ways. Firstly, the mystery speaks to man in an earthly form. Secondly, it comes closer to man and at the same time moves away from him (Welte 1997: 183–194). Thus, it can be said that, while revealing itself, it still remains in some way hidden, for it does not cease to be transcendent.

The English philosopher and theologian Keith Ward emphasises that revelation of the Transcendent, is one of the fundamental phenomena of religion. According to him, four models of revelation can be distinguished: encounter, inner

insight, historical event and cosmic law. In the first two models, man acquires knowledge through the authority of some charismatic person or through his own ascetic efforts. In the later models, he is subject to the action of a personal God or an impersonal law (Ward 1994: 326–329). As a rule, however, two types of revelation are distinguished: natural through nature and historical through events. In each case, however, it has the following elements: source, content, mediator and recipient.

The idea of revelation is therefore, according to John E. Smith, an integral part of religion as a phenomenon established independently of man. It consists in the discovery of the transcendent Absolute and is a way of knowing Him. An intensive participation of man's cognitive faculties is therefore required. Revelation takes place through a specific medium, which can be any being (e.g. nature, event, person). It reveals the presence of Transcendence and demands interpretation. Smith emphasises, however, that it goes always beyond its mediator (Smith 1971: 56–57, 73–87, 94–98). The revelation of the transcendent is thus made primarily through natural facts, historical events, acts of a person or verbal communication. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that all forms of revelation call for interpretation. It is always finite and flawed if only because of geographical, social, historical and personal conditions.

Following the thought of the German philosopher Karl Jaspers, it can therefore be said that Transcendence manifests itself through the so-called 'ciphers' in which it is encoded. These ciphers are ambiguous. They speak not so much to

man's intellect, but rather to his existence. The world of ciphers is, according to Jaspers, a field of spiritual struggle in which man shapes his existence (Jaspers 1995: 45–46, 95–97). Instead, Berger speaks in this context of certain signs of Transcendence. One of these is the universal search for an order of meaning, linked to the symbolic order without which no community can exist. Another sign is entertainment, in the course of which the temporal structure of everyday life appears to be suspended and one enters another temporal dimension. Still another sign of transcendence is hope that characterises human destiny in the face of pain and hardship (Berger 1969: 82–87). Transcendence is therefore the source of the meaning that man gives to the reality around him and to the various spheres of his life (Berger 1979: 131). Berger emphasises elsewhere that the importance of a meaningful order of reality, entertainment and hope, which are signs of the existence of another world, must be valued. For the order attributed to the world points to an order that existed before the appearance of man. Through entertainment, one recognises that tragedy is not necessarily the ultimate or most important element of existence. Instead, preserving hope in the face of death opens one up to the idea that death will not necessarily be the last word of existence. The world is thus sacramental in nature, because it appears as a symbol of different reality (Berger 1992: 135, 150–152). Some prefer, moreover, to speak of 'tropes' of transcendence. These do not have the force of proof, but are recognised through a specific human attitude and existential

commitment. The tropes open up a space of different interpretations, inherent not only in religious traditions, but also in unspecified forms of spirituality (Rembierz 2014: 25–26). Ciphers, signs and tropes thus act as intermediaries guiding man towards the discovery of the Transcendent, whose existence is not obvious to man and impossible to prove.

In this context, two more important problems of revelation are worth noting. The first is the lack of total revelation. The second is the lack of universal accessibility to revelation.

Salamon thus points out, in no religion do we have a complete revelation of the divine Transcendence. Each religious belief system is the product of the encounter between the finite human mind and the infinite divine mind, between which there is a fundamental difference. Man, moreover, forms his belief in the manifested Transcendence by means of reason, imagination, a certain logic, language and the intuitions he possesses, all of which are conditioned in different ways (Salamon 2015: 231). Thus, it can be said that the Transcendence also remains a mystery in revelation and discloses itself only to a certain extent. It seems that the paradox of the situation is that the revealed Transcendence remains hidden. The extent of revelation depends on man's epistemic capacities and/or his spiritual needs. Fol-

lowing, moreover, the intuition of Augustine of Hippo, one can conclude that a divine being fully revealed and known by man would not be God, but at most some kind of idol.

However, the problem of the lack of universal access to revelation is highlighted by Jacek Wojtysiak. It occurs in almost every religion and even concerns the common core of revelations present in all theistic religions. It mainly concerns ordinary people who interpret certain facts of their lives as manifestations of God's action. According to Wojtysiak, people do not have access to revelation for reasons of time (they lived before the appearance of revelation), intellect (they doubt revelation), culture (they function in an era of secularisation) and geography (they live in an area without religion) (Wojtysiak 2021: 222–224). As a result of the four reasons mentioned by Wojtysiak, a certain group of people do not have access to the revelation of the Transcendent and thus do not have the opportunity to contact with it. These persons therefore live in a situation of concealment of the divine being. However, they do not seem to have access exclusively to the direct revelation of the Transcendence, which, moreover, has never been universal. They may, however, deal with a revelation mediated by a particular religion, founded on it and being the means of its transmission in specific socio-cultural context.

CONCLUSION

Religion can be understood as the expression of the revelation of a mysterious and initially formless transcendent being,

which, as a result of its revelation to man, takes on a definite shape and is subject to a process of conceptualisation. It may

take a non-personal form as some multi-dimensional ultimate reality (metaphysical, axiological, soteriological) or a personal form as a being open to an interpersonal relationship with man. The revelation of the Transcendent, however, seems never to be direct, but is always mediated through some medium. It also lacks obviousness. Using the conceptual apparatus of scholasticism, it can be said that it takes place by means of some opaque mediator (*medium quod*). The role of such an intermediary may be played by certain intellectual-cognitive states, organic-affective experiences, sensory and imaginative forms, inner inspirations, natural events, experiences of ordinary and extraordinary things. Revelation can take place in a propositional manner, i.e. by accepting and accepting as true judgments of a certain cognitive content, or in a non-propositional manner, i.e. by manifesting itself in certain feelings, states of consciousness and events. In each case, however, the moment of interpretation is important because, to use the language of the Romanian religious scholar Mircea

Eliade, every revelation is dialectical, disclosing the infinite in the finite, and ambivalent, that is, ambiguous in its reception. The appropriate interpretation of revelation is therefore crucial, since the result may be the recognition and acknowledgement in a given phenomenon of the presence and action of the Transcendent, or the absence of such recognition and acknowledgement. The acceptance of the theistic interpretation and the corresponding revelation, however, is ultimately dependent on man's free decision, which determines the further shape of his existence. The consequence of a particular interpretation is also the emergence of a particular type of religion understood as an expression of the revelation of Transcendence. It can therefore be stated that religion is a form of interpretation of human contact with the surrounding reality understood in terms of 'experience-as' (John Hick) or 'seeing-as' (Richard Kearney). For religious man experiences (sees) and understands the world as an expression, a sign of the presence of Transcendence.

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