

S. Astapov

Prof. S. Astapov, Southern
Federal University, Rostov-on-
Don, Russian Federation.
E-mail: snastapov@sfedu.ru,
ORCID: [https://orcid.
org/0000-0001-7697-2170](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7697-2170)

DOI: [http://dx.doi.
org/10.18820/23099089/actat.
Sup32.3](http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.Sup32.3)

ISSN: 1015-8758 (Print)

ISSN: 2309-9089 (Online)

Acta Theologica 2021

Supp 32:13-30

Date received:

27 February 2021

Date accepted:

02 August 2021

Date published:

10 December 2021

Transforming the study of religious situations: The view of post- secular society theories¹

ABSTRACT

This article considers the methodology of post-secular society theories for application to research on religion. Several issues of present sociological methodology are associated with the secular discourse that divides society into subsystems and represents religion as one of them. Such an approach does not consider the role of non-institutional forms of religion, religious ideas, and moods of individuals in forming the religious situation. The discourse emerging from theories of the post-secular society, which recognise the transformation of the place of religion in the public sphere at the beginning of the 21st century, views the contradictory unity of religious and secular moments in any social phenomenon. This transforms the established scientific approach to the study of religion with concepts of post-secular society theories. This article defines the principal characteristics of the post-secular model of religious situations compared to the principles of the secular model.

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of the place and role of religion in society is important for understanding what religion is as a social phenomenon. This question, concretised by the conditions of space and time, appears to be one of the religious situation. If knowledge on religion did not have



Published by the UFS

<http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/at>

© Creative Commons

With Attribution (CC-BY)



¹ This article was funded by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR), under grant number 20-011-00400.

such concretisation, it would be so abstract that its application to some religious groups would require a considerable amount of clarification and qualification. However, these concepts are only useful if they convey a certain empirical content, again defined by place and time.

This specification is reflected in the sociological definition of the religious situation, namely “the complex of relations in society about religion which exist at a concrete time and at certain spatial scales” (Smirnov 2017:254). However, empirical studies are always fraught with the issue of the variability of the concrete and its dependence not only on place and time, but also on the position of a researcher, and the methods and tools used for a study. Due to the fact that the concept of a religious situation occurs in various texts and contexts, from philosophical to legal and even administrative, it can be assumed that its content will also differ, depending on the context.

In order not to get lost in the definitions of the religious situation, one should either recognise one of the interpretations of this concept as the most functional, operationalised for working with a specific set of data (those that make up the empirical side of the study of the religious situation), or accept the sociological definition as the main one. This acceptance is justified by the fact that the concept of a religious situation is fully developed in sociology. Sociology establishes the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of a religious situation, its structure, objective and subjective aspects, social determinants, and the internal and external factors of its development. However, by distinguishing religious associations in their diversity and interactions with each other and with other social institutions as the subjective aspect of the religious situation, and the social conditions and factors, in which the religious situation develops, as the objective aspect, sociologists reduce religion to one of the social institutions. This reduction is acceptable for sociology.

However, the religious situation implies not only the interactions of religious communities among themselves and with other social groups, but also the ideological basis that provides these interactions (following its sociological definition as “a complex of relations in society about religion”), and gives them a form and direction of development, as well as the cultural results produced by these interactions. Of course, the sociology of religion is not fenced off from other studies of religion such as historical, anthropological, psychological, political, cultural, and so on. Moreover, modern social research welcomes interdisciplinarity; it is the norm rather than an exception. This creates confidence in supplying those moments of the religious situation that prove to be outside the field of the sociology of religion. Sociology of religion is the most important part of religious

studies. Its interaction with other disciplines belonging to religious studies represents the “religious situation”. However, the sociological approach has become the paradigm for modern religious studies in qualifying the place and role of religion in society. Despite the fact that sociology of religion is not a homogeneous scientific area with a unified methodology, and therefore the issue of defining the religious situation may not be an issue for some sociological studies, the specified principles of studying the religious situation are rooted in this science, although the post-secular discourse has also gained strength therein.

This article aims to show how the vision of the religious situation is transformed when the approach, founded in theories of the post-secular society, is applied in religious studies. In other words, the aim of the article is contained in the proposal to discuss a new methodology for studying the religious situation, for understanding the role of religion in specific spatial and temporal characteristics. This new methodology includes elements of normative knowledge such as philosophy and theology in the study of the religious situation.

2. PRINCIPLES OF THE MODERN STUDY OF THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION

A summary of the principles of modern scientific studies of the religious situation can be found, for example, in Yablokov’s *Fundamentals of religious studies*, the most famous Russian textbook on religious studies. I refer to this textbook, because it presents common concepts and theories recognised in the relevant branch of knowledge, or at least concepts that have sufficient epistemological grounds to represent one of the significant research positions. *Fundamentals of religious studies* contains several statements or principles,

the implementation of which will help to analyse the role of religion objectively, using concrete historical approach, in certain conditions of place and time (Yablokov 2001:84).

2.1 The first principle

The role of religion cannot be considered the initial and determining for social life, although it has a reverse effect on economic relations and other spheres of the life ... The religious factor influences economy, politics, state, relations among nationalities, family, cultural areas through activity of religious individuals, groups, and

organisations in these areas. There is an 'imposition' of religious relations on other social relations (Yablokov 2001:84, italics added).

According to this, religion influences society through the activity of religious individuals or their communities, which are "superimposed" on different types of activity independent of religion, resulting in some transformation of these types. However, since religion is not the sphere of activity that determines society, it should be assumed, first, that there are some kinds of social activity that are completely free of religion and, secondly, that religion has such a weak effect on some types of social activity that it is either not recorded empirically at all, or may not be taken into account in research, due to its insignificance.

2.2 The second principle

The degree of influence of religion is related to its place in society, and this place is not once and forever given; it changes in the context of the processes of sacralisation and secularisation. These processes are heterogeneous, contradictory, and unequal in societies of different types, at successive stages of their development (Yablokov 2001:84-85).

From this point of view, the religious situation is a fixation of the place of religion in society in a specific period. The shorter this period, the more accurate the description of the religious situation will be. This description simultaneously contains an understanding of the determination of the present religious situation by social processes that took place earlier, which can be interpreted as a chain of religious situations replacing one another.

2.3 The third principle

There is a peculiar influence of religion on society, its subsystems, on the individual and personality of tribal, national, regional, world religions, as well as individual religious trends and confessions (Yablokov 2001:85).

This implies not only that different religions have different effects on society, but also that the typology of religions is one of the tools used for the analysis of the religious situation.

2.4 The fourth principle

Religion is a systemic formation which includes a number of elements and connections: consciousness with its own characteristics and levels, extra-cult and cult activities and relationships, institutions

for orientation in non-religious and religious areas. The functioning of these elements and connections gave results corresponding to them, their content and orientation (Yablokov 2001:85).

This means that the degree of influence of religion depends, in addition to all the above, on the sphere of religion and its structural element, which influences some social processes and institutions.

2.5 The fifth principle

It is important to consider the correlation of the humanistic and the particular in religion ... In contemporary conditions, the significance of activity of any institutions, groups, parties, leaders, including religious ones, is determined primarily by the extent of service to establishing humanistic values (Yablokov 2001:86).

The implementation of this principle provides a single scale for the value measurement of religion, as well as any other social phenomenon. It is a scale of humanistic values.

In methodological terms, the research principles given in the textbook are the principles of modern social sciences, which were formed as a specific cognitive activity in the secular era. The essential characteristic of the secular methodology is the differentiation of the studied reality. Society is divided into subsystems, one of which is religion. The religious subsystem is represented as a set of religious communities, each of which recognised as an association of individuals based on common ideas and actions. The real role of religion in society may differ greatly from the ideals contained in its doctrine, because a religion is not only a doctrine, but also a multitude of organisations that interact with each other and with other social communities. Since different interactions pursue different aims, their combined result is not equal to achieving the aim expressed in creeds of any denomination. This means that, in order to understand the religious situation, a researcher needs to study each of its subsystems in detail. In other words, the religious situation is represented as a system of elements, each of which has quantitative (based on statistical indicators) and qualitative (based on the analysis of representations of consciousness and behaviour) characteristics.

This “discourse of differentiations” is grounded on the belief that researchers know exactly what religion is; in other words, they have a strict definition of religion that allows them to distinguish between religious and non-religious, cult and non-cult, sacred and secular phenomena. However, in the second half of the 20th century, scholars realised that there was no universal definition of religion, nor even a single set of

essential characteristics of religion. Sociologists were the first among all researchers of religion who came from essentialist definitions of religion to functional ones. Moreover, the theories of post-secular society emerging at the beginning of the 21st century struggle to draw boundaries between religious and non-religious phenomena: religious moments are found in all spheres of social life, not superimposed on other social relations, but acting as an integral part of them. Para-religious phenomena, quasi-religious ones, heterodox forms of religiosity, cyber-churches, and other commercialised forms of religion also make defining religion problematic. As a result, a different methodology may be used for the study of the religious situation, and the results of this research may be presented in a different discourse, using different conceptual means. These means can be found in the theories of the post-secular society.

3. THE CONCEPTUAL NOVELTY OF THE POST-SECULAR SOCIETY THEORIES

The term “post-secular” acknowledges the transformation of the place of religion in the public sphere. This transformation is evidenced by both quantitative indicators (an increase both in the number of religious communities in post-socialist countries and in religious diasporas in Western Europe and North America), and the qualitative presence of religion in the public sphere: the inability to ignore the voice of religious communities in discussions on public topics (Habermas 2005); religion has re-emerged as a public issue (Casanova 2018); religion returns into the public sphere. This shows not so much the revival of well-known religions, but rather the appearance of new forms of religiosity (Turner 2010).

Concerning the theories that formed in the secular era, the theories of the post-secular society demonstrate the insolvency and error of an approach that puts religious ideas, notions, and moods “outside the brackets” of research when analysing social processes, in which the participation of religious communities is not directly recorded. This failure is explained not only by the increased “specific weight” of religion in society over the past two to three decades, due to the activity of religious communities in public relations, but also by the narrow consideration of religion as one of the social institutions. The theories of the post-secular society proclaim not so much a new stage in the development of society, where the place of religion has radically changed in comparison with the previous secular stage (although they also mark the processes of desecularisation), but a new vision for the role of religion in society. In other words, the approach to understanding the meaning of religion for

social processes has changed, because the process of secularisation has been completed and the opposite process has started. Whether or not society has become post-secular is still under discussion. However, these discussions are not about the place of religion in society, but about its significance.

Instead of the discrete model of society formed in the “discourse of differentiations”, the authors of the theories of the post-secular society propose a model that is conditioned by the discourse of self-reflexivity (Rosati 2014). This model does not have a name, because it has not yet been definitely constructed. Conditionally, it can be called tensional (if we use the Latin word *tensio* or English *tension* with the same meaning). This does not presuppose the separation of religion from the studied reality as a formation with a certain structure. It is suggested that we view religion as a social totality – something that permeates all spheres of society (if there is a need to talk about spheres). Religion is viewed as the semantic line of society and culture, the core of humanity.

The last statement cannot be considered scientific: it has theological or philosophical meaning and is rejected by science, which broke free from theological and metaphysical premises during the secular era. Science has regarded religious knowledge as marginal; its rational elements have been considered the result of the syncretisation of religious irrationalism with positive knowledge obtained through the non-religious activity of believers. However, from the point of view of the post-secular society theories, this thesis should be accepted, because science does not have the right to be considered the only reliable source of knowledge in the post-secular society. In addition, modern culture has experienced a decline in the status of the scientific world view in favour of increasingly religious and mythological ideas. In the secular society, scientific knowledge enjoyed priority in terms of its epistemological status and served as a model for the representation of various non-scientific cognitive strategies, based on everyday philosophical, and even theological experience. O’Brien and Noy (2015:5) point out that

a post-secular worldview rejects the strict adherence to science characteristic of modernity. Instead, it blends scientific, religious, and other authorities to provide a personally compelling narrative of the world. In essence, a post-secular perspective views any singular interpretative framework, such as science or religion, as only a partial explanation of reality. Thus, the promise of post-secular theories is not to anticipate uniform preferences for science or religion, but to clarify the circumstances under which individuals prefer different kinds of explanations. the promise of post-secular theories is not to

anticipate uniform preferences for science or religion, but to clarify the circumstances under which individuals prefer different kinds of explanations.

Post-secularity means recognising the rationality of religious judgements. It behoves non-religious researchers to acknowledge that the religious vision of the world contains the potency of truth. In this regard, Habermas (2006a:259-260) noted:

The expectation of a continuing disagreement between faith and knowledge only deserves the predicate “reasonable” if, from the perspective of secular knowledge, religious convictions are also accorded an epistemic status that is not irrational per se. ... Secularized citizens, insofar as they act in their role as citizens of a state, may neither deny out of hand the potential for truth in religious conceptions of the world nor dispute the right of believing fellow citizens to make contributions to public discussions that are phrased in religious language.

Understood as a practice of transcendence, an exit beyond the limits of existence, and an aspiration for the ultimate foundations of being, religion permanently induces states and intentions to overcome the current situation, including the religious one. However, any situation, from the point of view of “the tensional theory”, can be considered simultaneously religious and non-religious. The manifestations of transcendence are multidimensional; its processes and mechanisms permeate all aspects of social life: religious, moral, aesthetic, political, and so on. Transcendence is one of the key principles of individual spirituality and the spiritual culture of society. An agent of transcendence is a person who has not only spirituality and mentality, but also physicality, who exists in various social practices. This means that individuals, who aim for the transcendent and strive to go beyond the limits of their everyday life, as corporal beings, satisfy their natural needs in the ways available in their experience, which tends to involve their economic activity. This, in turn, is immersed in everyday existence.

Some authors of post-secular society theories suggest scrutinising culture as a field permeated by religious and non-religious (secular) “power lines”. Van der Zweerde (2012:101) proposes that

every culture relies, among other things, on the binary opposition, constitutive for it, of the sacred (heavenly, taboo, untouchable, indisputable, *harām*, etc.) and the profane (earthly, accessible, consumable, debatable, *halāl*, etc.). This constitutive binary opposition is provided by religion.

Kyrlezhev (2012:59) suggests studying individual and social existence as a tension field between the religious and secular poles:

And then the combined life activity of a person and people will be natural – life activity which takes place in an ideological and pragmatic field of tension between these two poles of culture – religious and secular. The religious pole forms the strictly religious (purely religious), which is easily recognised in almost all cultures. And the opposite secular pole is pragmatical worldly, that is connected with the very process of life and survival; in other words, it is *conatus*, or something biological as pre-cultural in the logical sense. Accordingly, if we are talking about culture (in the most general sense), it is determined, on the one hand, by the religious pole (or quasi-religious ...), and on the other hand, by the opposite biological pole.

Kyrlezhev's understanding of the secular as a kind of pragmatic pole of human existence does not correspond to the understanding represented in the theories of secularisation. Kyrlezhev translates the concept of "secular" into a range of anthropological categories and creates its contradictory unity with the category of "religious" as the main contradiction of a human's social being.

Culture and society are thus represented in this model as a kind of power field between two poles: the religious, which expresses the ultimate foundations of being, and the secular, which expresses the biological and pragmatic foundations of human activity. Any phenomenon in this field is both religious and secular; the prevalence of one characteristic means a reduction of the other, and the degree of expression of the religious or the secular in it depends on which "pole" it is closer to.

Of course, such a model of society is unacceptable for the modern social sciences. First, because metaphysical concepts (transcendence, the ultimate foundations of being) are introduced into research tools and become *a priori* matrices for interpreting the results of empirical research. Secondly, no one has yet proposed a research programme based on the principles of the post-secular model, or at least a methodological elaboration of these principles for social studies. However, the post-secular approach has emerged. The theories of the post-secular society are not methodological studies; they are a changed vision of the social and cultural situation, indicating that it is possible to get a more effective cognitive result if researchers examine social reality, using different research optics.

Thus, the post-secular model of society cannot be “embedded” in the framework of modern scientific knowledge. Its principles relate to philosophical knowledge, but this does not mean that only science can give a complete knowledge of religion and the religious situation. An exclusion of philosophical and theological judgements from social knowledge does not make it more accurate nor does it allow researchers to observe the dynamics of religious content (narratives of the sacred) in various symbolic systems of culture (in art, literature, political rhetoric, and so on). This impoverishes the picture of the religious situation.

According to Rosati (2014:284), the discourse of self-reflexivity, as a discourse of post-secular society, assumes that

a high level of self-reflexivity – both modernity and the religions themselves – will launch a process of mutually additional learning between secular and religious forms of life, which, in turn, will creatively give life to hybrid social practices, re-form the boundaries between these two dimensions, and start negotiations about identities, roles, spaces, etc.

In this discourse, both science and religion are forced to reflect on their boundaries in the knowledge of reality. Casanova (2018:147-148) notes that, when, in modern times, the secular consciousness (the consciousness “closed to any form of transcendence beyond the purely secular immanent framework”) ceased to be part of the “religious-secular” dyad and was constituted as a self-enclosed reality, the whole world began to be perceived as irreligious “by default”, regardless of the fact that religious people live in it. The present time returns to the first part of the dyad. According to Casanova (2018:167-170), “we have become obsessed with religion as a question, especially as a public problem”, and the categories of secular consciousness do not help us understand actual religious processes, but rather lead to a fundamental misunderstanding. Therefore,

first of all we need ‘de-secularisation’ of our consciousness and our secularist and modernist categories, so that we can develop more adequate concepts with which to understand novelty and modernity of the processes taking place before our eyes.

4. THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN THE RESEARCH OPTICS OF THE POST-SECULAR SOCIETY THEORIES

The research optics of social sciences formed in the secular paradigm can be likened to a prism. It is no coincidence that scientific articles of the 20th century, and even in our century, contain calls to observe a particular social phenomenon “through the prism” of some theory. A prism is used in optics to refract a light ray, either to separate beams that have different wavelengths or to change the course of a ray relative to the optical axis. Similarly, looking “through the prism of theory” means differentiating the reality under study to focus attention on one aspect, or, with the same aim, to change the research position.

The research optics of those social theories that are beginning to form in the contemporary “post-secular” time can be likened to a lens. I am not talking about the fact that a lens increases or decreases something, but that it refracts light rays so that they gather at one point – the focus. When the lens refracts rays, it leaves one of them non-refracted (the one that goes along its axis). Likewise, the “post-secular optics” has one axial line that is not refracted but collects on itself to focus all that was “refracted” during the study. This line concerning studies of the religious situation is religion itself.

At first glance, the last statement does not express any specific advantages of the “post-secular” approach in comparison with the “secular” one. After all, researchers of the religious situation investigate the activity of *religious* organisations. Therefore, the researchers must have in mind criteria for classifying any phenomenon as religious or non-religious; moreover, they must use the typology of religions as a kind of research tool. However, I must repeat that contemporary religious studies do not have a universal definition of religion. I must also add that there is no typology of religions common to all studies. Of course, researchers can use one of the existing definitions of religion, which is more convenient for them in terms of studying the religious situation. Upon obtaining the results, the researchers will register all the limitations in their interpretation that are associated with the use of this definition and its operationalisation, in order to draw a more precise conclusion.

However, it is worth mentioning that contemporary sociologists who study quasi-religions point out the inaccuracy of sociological terms for drawing distinctions between religious and non-religious phenomena in their research field. This means that the boundary between the religious and the non-religious is essential, but often indistinct or dynamic. This

leads to frequent discussions about the boundaries of religion among scholars. It is a difficult problem for the secular approach, in that religious phenomena exist side by side with other non-religious phenomena. The post-secular society theories suggest a different vision of religion: religion is viewed as an axis of any social phenomena (or as one of two axes if the secular is taken as the second axis). In this case, it is necessary not to determine more precisely the boundaries of religion, but to perceive its manifestations.

The objection to this statement is that we must understand the specifics of religion, in order to perceive the religious in a particular phenomenon. This is true, but this specificity is defined neither by genus and difference, as in the essentialist approach to religion, nor by the establishment of a set of functional characteristics, as in the functional approach, but by the dialectic contradiction of "the secular-the religious". The criterion of availability in the phenomenon of one or the other aspect of this contradiction is the position of believers who profess "traditional religions", religions included historically in a national culture. This statement can also raise objections, or at least a question: Why is the position of representatives of traditional religions decisive when it is not the position of secular people or of people who profess new religions?

A simple argument for the priority of traditional religions over new ones can be adduced: there is no disagreement that traditional religions are religions, but the same cannot be said of some of the new religions. As for the secular position, one can only say that, when it is decisive, religion is pushed to the peripheral plane, and the whole world is placed in the "immanent frame of the secular world" (Casanova). There is no danger that the religious view will create its own "frame" (immanent or transcendent), because in post-secular discourse, the secular is no weaker than the religious; both create the tension that is the driving force of this discourse.

In other words, we are talking about the admission of theology as a cognitive system in the study of the religious situation. This admission is a consequence of the post-secular transformation of religious studies, from the position of post-secularism theorists. It should be assumed that the result of theological research will differ from that of scientific research, and this difference will first be manifested in a normative or estimative theological judgement about the religious situation. At the beginning of the 20th century, religious studies adopted the principle of non-normativism – abstention from estimative judgement about religious ideas, and from a comparison of the value systems of religions. However, not all researchers have strictly followed this principle. Most of the researchers who completed empirical studies on religions followed it. When the studies showed an

increase in the level of generalisation, the normative statements appeared. Social knowledge cannot be complete without normative statements. A quote from the cited textbook on religious studies serves as an example:

in contemporary conditions, the significance of the activities of any institutions, groups, parties, leaders, including religious ones, *is determined primarily by the extent of service to establishing humanistic values*" (Yablokov 2001:86, italics added).

In this passage, humanistic values are proclaimed as the basis for an estimation of religious activity. Regarding a similar situation, Radcliffe (2004:68) expressed, as a theological assessment of sociological non-normativism, the idea that has long been known to philosophers,

sociological theories are not value-free. The explanations proposed always derive from and express some prior implicit or explicit interpretation of the meaning of man's existence and destiny.

The cited textbook contains statements of the value dimension of social activity, as this dimension is obviously present in research. In addition, the assumption of a theological point of view does not mean that the post-secular model recognises this point of view as the only true one. A feature of the post-secular model of a "public use of reason" is the dialogue of religious and secular "epistemic stances" (Habermas 2006b). Uzlaner (2015:145) opines that Habermas' position represents a "weak version" of the epistemological contribution of religion to the public debate. However, a "strong version" – postmodern – implies an epistemological equalisation of religion and science,

the Postmodern strategy, in turn, consists in a fundamental epistemological equalisation of any metaphysical doctrines, at least in their projection on socio-political discussions. In this sense, the scientific and religious worldviews are only different, but equally possible languages of description and – most importantly – equally understandable and accessible to any citizen, regardless of whether the citizen is a believer or an atheist.

I cannot enter into detailed descriptions of research into the post-secular model of the religious situation, because details have not yet been defined. I can, however, identify the principal features of this model, using the conceptual tools of post-secular society theories. As a starting point for the identification, I will transform the five principles discussed in the cited textbook on religious studies according to the post-secular view.

The first principle: The role of religion, in relationships with the transcendent, should be considered primary and defining for social life, since the intention to transcend is an integral part of human activity.

The second principle: The degree of religion's social influence changes in the context of the processes of sacralisation and secularisation, which are not successive, but opposite processes existing simultaneously. This is a sacral-secular dialectics of social relations.

The third principle: The peculiarity of the influence of religion on society is determined by the intention of individuals and social groups, first beyond the limits of the present existence, and ultimately to the absolute being.

The fourth principle: Religion is a systematic formation, whose elements and connections, in terms of both their functioning and their existence, are determined by the attitude of individuals to the transcendent (supernatural) being.

The fifth principle: The significance of the activity of any institutions, groups, parties, or leaders in the religious situation is determined primarily by the extent of service to establish absolute values.

The religious situation is thus described as a state of society in terms of a correlation of two moments in society: the religious, as a movement towards the absolute being, and the secular, as activities and relations associated with ensuring life processes and the satisfaction of bodily needs. The quantitative and qualitative characteristics recorded by sociologists also apply to the specified representation of the religious situation, the only difference being that they are considered inseparable from each other, as "quantity of quality"; in other words, the degree of expression of the trait, or its intensity.

To classify a phenomenon as belonging to religion and then to assess the degree of expression or intensity of the religious in a particular social phenomenon requires a reference to transcendence, recognised through meanings related to this act. In this approach, religion is understood as the involvement of individuals and social groups in an activity focused on the absolute being. This activity is based on a sense or understanding of the inauthenticity or inadequacy of the present existence, and the impossibility of achieving "the true being" by one's own efforts – a sense that generates not pessimism, frustration, and despair, but a belief in the person who is related to the transcendent and who is able to overcome "the inauthentic being" – the person whose way of life is the overcoming of this "inauthenticity".

Of course, it is possible to find an argument against the view that faith in the transcendent and transcendence are signs of religion and to talk about secular forms of transcendence: creativity or ecstasy, for example. One can disagree with the statement that every religion is an intention to achieve the absolute existence, and to find a few examples in the history of religions that refute it. In this case, the secular vision of the world, with all the issues described earlier, is preserved. The post-secular research optics focuses on the religious situation of a post-secular society and is effective for investigating this society, rather than a secular or pre-secular (traditional) one. Discussions about the concepts of the “absolute being”, “transcendent”, “supernatural”, and so on and about which of them is more acceptable for describing the religious situation will be useful for improving this “optics” and will not hinder the study of the religious situation.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the post-secular approach, the religious situation, which demonstrates the position of religion in society in its spatial and temporal certainty, ceases to be exclusively a subject of study of the sociology of religion. The fact that the concept of the religious situation in the secular research paradigm is used not only in the sociology of religion, but also in other branches of knowledge that are not even related to religious studies, does not define the content of this concept more clearly, but only specifies it depending on the sphere of use. Considering the religious situation “through the prism” of the concepts and theories of any branch of modern differentiated knowledge gives a “refraction”, an interpretation of the real position of religion from a certain perspective, leaving the study of other aspects to other branches of knowledge. The only aspect that unites all studies of the religious situation is their object of research, which is not religion, as the concept of “religion” does not have a precise meaning. The object is a complex of relations in society regarding the activities of organisations considered religious in this society.

Because the post-secular research paradigm is still forming its approaches and conceptual framework, it is difficult to say how effectively it will overcome the variable representation of the religious situation and create an integrative image. However, there are at least two aspects where the post-secular research paradigm reveals its advantages over the secular one.

First, it does not reduce all manifestations of religion (and, consequently, the variety of reactions to these manifestations) to the activity of religious organisations. It suggests that not only religious communities, but also

individuals and the religious ideas objectified in various cultural phenomena that, at first sight, have no connection with these communities, should be viewed as agents of religious activity. Non-institutional forms of religiosity, which are the product of an eclectic combination or synthesis of ideas of various religious and non-religious doctrines, the arbitrary construction of religious identity by individuals themselves, and/or a selective approach to the norms of religious life within a religious denomination are not related to the activities of religious organisations, but should be taken into account when describing the religious situation.

Secondly, the post-secular research optics allows us to view the religious situation not only from the position of external observers, for whom all religious organisations are only communities of believers, but also from the position of believers, who have some degree of involvement in religion (the very level of religiosity, measurement of which is constantly debated among sociologists) and estimate the place and role of religion in society on the basis of doctrinal provisions that are realised or not realised in their social activities. In other words, the religious situation, as a concept, appears in a variety of discourses such as scientific, philosophical, theological, day-to-day, and political debates.

Whether the post-secular methodology will allow us to combine this diversity into a single concept is also a difficult question. However, it can definitely be argued that a post-secular methodology overcomes the mutual disregard of scientific and theological discourses, as well as the appeal of scientists and theologians to philosophy, not so much for methodological purposes as for ideological and apologetic ones, which has been observed in the secular paradigm. The dominance of the epistemological status of science in this paradigm allows scientists to ignore the theological vision of the religious situation and incorrectly portrays the “superimposition” of religious relations on other social relations. However, in modern society, where many people are not indifferent to establishing a religious identity and traditional religions declare that society should not ignore the statements of representatives of a theological intellectual tradition on social issues, at least because the tradition has centuries-old experience, secular “epistemological ranking” loses its significance.

The “post-secular” transformation of the study of religion is expressed in the emergence of the new research optics, with the understanding that religion does not dissolve the essence of religion in a multitude of functional and descriptive characteristics. This understanding suggests seeing the specificity of religion in the division of the world into the transcendent versus everyday existence and moving a person between them. This understanding asserts that, along with the totality of the everyday in human

life, there is a totality of the religious. In interaction, these totalities limit each other and so cease to be totalities, expressed in a variety of social and cultural phenomena. The sphere of religion includes those phenomena that carry meanings which provide a solution to the “ultimate questions” of human existence. Religion provides an understanding of birth and death, good and evil, blessedness and suffering – not at the level of particular situations in life, but at the level of generalisations that relate people to the actual conditions of their existence. The religious situation in this context portrays how believers respond to these “ultimate questions” by their actions in a specific society at a particular place and time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CASANOVA, J.

2018. Exploring the post-secular. Three meanings of “the secular” and their possible transcendence. *Gosudarstvo, religija, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* [State, Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide] 4(36):143-174. (In Russian.). <https://doi.org/10.22394/2073-7203-2018-36-4-143-174>

HABERMAS, J.

2005. Pre-political foundations of the democratic rule of law? In: F. Schuller (ed.), *Dialektik der Säkularisierung*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana (in Russian translation, 2006) (Moscow: St. Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute), pp. 39-75.

2006a. On the relations between the secular liberal state and religion. In: H. de Vries & L.E. Sullivan (eds), *Political theologies: Public religions in a post-secular world* (New York: Fordham University Press), pp. 251-260.

2006b. Religion in the public sphere. *European Journal of Philosophy* 14:1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x>

KYRLEZHEV, A.

2012. Post-secular conceptualization of religion: Formulating the problem. *Gosudarstvo, religija, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* [State, Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide] 2(30):52-68. (In Russian.) [Online.] Retrieved from: <http://www.religion.ranepa.ru/ru/node/119> [20 February 2021].

O'BRIEN, T.L. & NOY, S.

2015. Traditional, modern, and post-secular perspectives on science and religion in the United States. [Online.] Retrieved from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0003122414558919> [20 February 2021].

RADCLIFFE, T.

2004. Relativizing the relativizers: A theologian's assessment of the role of sociological explanation of religious phenomena and theology today? In: D. Martin, J.O. Mills & W.S.F. Pickering (eds.), *Sociology and theology: Alliance and conflict* (Leiden: Brill), pp. 151-162.

ROSATI, M.

2014. Postsecular modernities: A sociological reading. *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* [State, Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide] 1:272-293. (In Russian.) [Online.] Retrieved from: <http://www.religion.ranepa.ru/en/node/605> [20 February 2021].

SMIRNOV, M.Y.

2017. Religious situation. In: M.Y. Smirnov (ed.), *Entsiklopedichesky slovar' sotsiologii religii* [Encyclopedic Vocabulary of Sociology of Religion] (Saint Petersburg: Platonovskoye Filosofskoe Obshchestvo), pp. 254-255. (In Russian).

TURNER, B.S.

2010. Religion in a post-secular society. In: B.S. Turner (ed.) *The new Blackwell companion to the sociology of religion* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell), pp. 649-667. doi: 10.1002/9781444320787

UZLANER, D.

2015. The dialogue of science and religion from the perspective of contemporary theories of democracy. *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* [State, Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide] 1:136-163. (In Russian.) [Online.] Retrieved from: <http://www.religion.ranepa.ru/en/node/844> [20 February 2021].

VAN DER ZWEERDE, E.

2012. Understanding the secular. *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* [State, Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide] 2(30):69-113. (In Russian.) [Online.] Retrieved from: <http://www.religion.ranepa.ru/node/120> [20 February 2021].

YABLOKOV, I.N.

2001. The functions and role of religion. In: I.N. Yablokov (ed.), *Osnovy religiovedenia: Uchebnik* [Fundamentals of Religious Studies: Textbook] (Moscow: Vysshaya shkola), pp.82-86. (In Russian.)

Keywords

Post-secular

Religious studies

Religious situation

Trefwoorde

Post-sekulêr

Godsdienstwetenskap

Godsdienstige situasie