In his book, Timothy Larsen, a professor of Christian Thought at Wheaton College, who holds a doctorate in history from the University of Stirling, Scotland (1997). He is occupied with handling Christian thought in the burgeoning science of anglophone anthropology. The basic scientific import is, whether it is true or not, that anthropology stands for an “anti-religious” and therefore “faith-hostile” attitude (p. 9). He points out the theoretical and philosophical anthropological ways of thinking which have been developed both by critics as well as proponents of Christian ethical values. Interesting is the apologetic Christian process, which he opens up towards a scientific discourse within the discipline of anthropology.

The discipline, which has been developing since the mid-19th century, is often underestimated in its scientific impact and unjustly reduced to evolutionary Darwinism and cultural anthropology. Larsen limits the study to British social anthropologists, as they offer, to his understanding, the widest diversity (p. 2). He starts with a historical perspective, but chooses following anthropologists: E. B. Tylor (1832-1917), James Frazer (1854-1941), E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973), Mary Douglas (1921-2007), Victor (1920-1983) and Edith Turner (1921- ). Those build on each other scientifically. The anthropological-scientific discourse starts with the socio-evolutionary approach (Tylor, Frazer), moves to functionalism (Malinowski), from there to functional-structuralism (Radcliffe-Brown), and into modern approaches (p. 6).

In anthropology, “religion” was considered at best “superstition”. As part of a critical-negative attitude the discipline reflects a “projection” or “compensation”, at the price of “preserving social solidarity” to be negotiated under sociological aspects (p. 10; Evans-Pritchard). Personal faith or belonging to a religious community was considered critically, as experienced by Mary Douglas: “No sincere anthropologist can be a Catholic” (2005:105). How does such thinking affect Anthropology?

_E. B. Tylor_ built his anthropological access on the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Comte used an evolutionist approach, looking at all human processes as three higher developing steps: 1. theological-fictional, 2. metaphysical and abstract, 3. scientifically-positive (p. 21). Tylor introduced the “comparative method”, which was based on similar stages of development for all ethnicities. He suggests that “higher-developed” ethnicities had already undergone “primitive stages” (p.22). “Animism” for him is the “science of savages”, “magic” an “incomplete approach to science” and “religion” the “aim to explain nature” (p. 23-25).

_James George Frazer_ performs another evolutionary three-step approach, based on the stages of “magic”, “religion”, and “science” (p. 41). Each culture processes through these, as does the biblical Judeo-Christian doctrine. Jesus’ death, he considers, is the “Haman of the Year”, which can be defined either as an always recurring “history of salvation” (believers) or “superstition” (critics; ibid.).

_Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard_ (1902-1973) brought ethnography in, starting the “comparative or descriptive” approach. His goal was to transport “them” to “us” (the English culture) (p. 84). At the same time he went through personal experiences (two world wars, death of his parents, the suicide death of his wife in 1959, early death of his first son in 1941; p. 115-116) that led him to convert to Catholicism (1941), yet a critical but confident, bible reading believer (p. 95, 102). Together with Franz Steiner he claimed that “religion” should have an independent status as a research object (p.127 so understood by Mary Douglas). He was aware of the anti-religious and faith-hostile attitude of his discipline (1947; p. 80, 96). He didn’t let himself be distracted and followed his father, a clergyman in the Church of England (p. 82), spiritually. His fame (Chair of Anthropology at the University of Oxford; knighted in 1971; p. 82) is well reflected in the eulogy given about him as the “most brilliant anthropolog-
Mary Douglas was overwhelmed by the impact of religious food regulations and their implementation (p. 120). She examined the spontaneous reactions to rituals from the point of view that formal, written and structured “natural symbols” are better than informal, personal and timeless ones (*Purity and Danger*, p. 135). Unlike Evans-Pritchard, who describes “magic” as a faulty experience, Douglas equates “magic” with religious sacraments or Christian tenets (p. 144-145). Her studies on Leviticus in *Purity and Danger* show her openness to biblical content, even though she interpreted the Bible allegorically (p. 151-155). She rejected the historical-critical approach of theologians to the Bible, as inadmissible for anthropologists, since research material should not be deconstructed by any scientist (p. 153).

Victor Turner (1920-1983) and Edith Turner (1921-; married 1943) are known for their atheistic beginnings and their joint conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1958 (p. 182), the latter taken by many anthropologist colleagues as betrayal. Childhood experiences had expelled them both from the Christian world, and only the “faith-experiences” in Africa (initiation rites, religious rituals) had them newly brought in touch with the Roman Catholic Church’s “world of experience” (p. 183-185). Their research on “pilgrimages” has made them both famous since 1968 (p. 194). This research was based on their own experiences (e.g. death of their daughter in 1960). Edith Turner is still anthropologically active today.

With this historical overview Larsen offers a fascinating study of a human discipline, and feels compelled to have to explain everything transcendent, based on reason and logic. Such methods are developed to approach, reject or displace “religion and transcendence” into the realm of experience. Larsen himself does not remain totally objective, something he could have made more explicit in the preface. For this reason, you get a true insight into the “how” of the negative anthropological attitude, but are missing an “objective” reasoning of the “why”.

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