



Suomen Antropologinen Seura The Finnish Anthropological Society

EDWARD WESTERMARCK -MUISTOLUENTO

Helsingin yliopiston päärakennus, vanha puoli, auditorio XV (Unioninkatu 34)
5. lokakuuta 2011 klo 18.00

EDWARD WESTERMARCK MEMORIAL LECTURE

Helsinki University Main Building, the old side, auditorium XV (Unioninkatu 34)
5th October 2011, at 6 pm

Transcendence and the Anthropology of Christianity

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Is there a unique anthropological understanding of the nature of Christianity? Although still quite new, over the last decade the anthropology of Christianity has become a robust field of discussion and debate. Given its rapid development, the time has perhaps come to consider this question. In this lecture, I argue that work carried out thus far suggests that a focus on the nature, variety, and cultural consequences of Christian notions of transcendence is emerging as a distinctive feature of the anthropological approach to the study of Christianity. Building on this point, I suggest that exploring differences between various Christian approaches to transcendence is a key to synthesizing the most important early debates in the anthropology of Christianity. These debates have centered on 1) the ways Christians, and Protestants in particular, understand the nature and ideal uses of language; 2) the role of Christianity in fostering self-conscious efforts toward bringing about radical cultural change; and 3) the tendency of Christianity to foster various kinds of individualism among its converts. By gathering these debates together through a focus on transcendence, we can develop a specifically anthropological understanding of Christianity that not only allows for productive cross-cultural comparison, but that also helps us raise broader questions about the relation of transcendence to social life of importance across many fields of anthropology and the social sciences more generally.