

Anthropological analysis on the new trends and changes of Catholic system of belief and rituals (With special references to Chilaw, Sri Lanka)

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Abstract:

Christianity is a religion based upon the teachings and miracles of Jesus. It plays one of the main moves around *Chilaw, Nattandiya and Wennapuwa*, Sri Lanka. This research examines the new trends and changes of the system called beliefs and rituals in Christianity. Catholic is the main Church in this area, and due to various reasons, several changes occurred in their belief and ritual system. Prominent example is during their early practices using Latin as the official language, the community did not familiar with the church because of the language difference and after these changes, administration made native language as their main performing language. This explorative, descriptive study based on these faiths and their significant characteristics. In this research, the sample size is 40 and respective fathers, sisters, brothers, and devotees were purposively interviewed utilizing unstructured interview method. The main aim of this research is to provide an anthropological knowledge of the latest trends in Catholic beliefs and rituals, through the changes of Sri Lankan social system and Christianity using *Chilaw* as the research area. To accomplish this research, the researcher utilized interviews, observation, and participant observation. In this study, the researcher observed that the administration as well as the Catholic devotees are still protecting the physical cultural materials of the Church. Prominent characteristics in Catholic beliefs and rituals are changed and modified due to complex social and cultural changes.

Keywords: *Believes, Christianity, Catholicism, Denominations, Rituals*

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Introduction

Religion is one of the prominent concepts in the social sciences. Christianity is the religion one of the prominent topics that study, under various fields in social sciences. The word religion is derived from Latin “religio” used by the Romans, before Jesus Christ, to indicate the worship of the demons. Generally, the idea that emphasize from the concept of religion is that the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods. It is a fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a group of people. These set of beliefs concern the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, and involve devotional and ritual observances. They also often contain a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs. The comparative study of religion formed a central building block of anthropology as the discipline emerged in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Evans-Pritchard focuses on a single African case study, showing interrelations among religious, social, and political aspects of Azande life. The book assesses the logic and consistency of Azande modes of thought and indicates how they might be translated into the understandings of a Western readership (Anthropology of Religion: Definition, History, Themes -iResearchNet, n.d.).

Tylor defines Religion in his book, “Primitive Culture”, (1871) as “belief in spiritual things.” His characterization is terse in comparison with Durkheim’s assertion in his book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Durkheim defines that a religion can be seen as “a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” (Durkheim, 1912). This definition of religion as a certain kind of object of study therefore also points toward a specific method of study. Durkheim’s depiction of social order proved highly influential for the British anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, who in the middle years of the century drew on such ideas in developing the notion of ‘structural functionalism’ a view of society as made up of, and stabilized by, interlocking and complementary components, including religious institutions. The emphasis on observable reality also informed Bronislaw Malinowski’s stress not on the evolution of religion, but on the importance of fieldwork in discerning the contemporary societal and psychological rationale behind ritual and magic. According to Clifford Geertz, Religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, persuasive, and longlasting moods and motivations (Geertz, 1973).

In Sri Lankan socio-cultural context, Buddhism plays one of the prominent protagonists. Gananath Obeyesekere and Richard Gombrich plays one of the most leading roles when considering the early works which attended to understand the changes of Sri Lankan Buddhism. Their controversial ideas on “Protestant Buddhism” built novel dimensions in religious studies in Sri Lanka and their theoretical aspects still utilized by scholars for their academic addresses. Obeyesekere and Gombrich (1988) pointed out the change in the cosmology and the creation of new religious roles which interconnected matters based on gods and other figures. Although they argued that strictly Buddhist ideas,

roles, and institutions have not remained unaffected by the new trends according to that period. Anyhow, their proposed concept called “Protestant Buddhism” caused novelty in the practices of Buddhism and prepared the field for a new term called “Applied Buddhism”. Sri Lanka has been conventionally considered a fort of Theravada Buddhism. According to Tilakaratne (2020) the organizational aspect of modern Buddhism, the sasana, comprising the four groups of bhikkus, bhikkunis and upasakas and upasikas, has undergone change. Pondering the new trends in Buddhism he highlighted about such concepts like, Trans-yanic Buddhism, American Buddhism, and Eco Buddhism (Green Buddhism). Amunugama (2016) besides underscored the contribution of Anagarika Dharmapala, Piyadasa Sirisena, John De Silva on the new trends of Sinhala Buddhism as well as the impact of theosophical society of Olcott. Although Christianity also playing one of the significant roles in Sri Lankan religious context.

Christianity as a tradition implicates the anthropologists in much more than the study of “a religion,” and while Asad’s approach to the study of Islam is methodologically sound, applying it to the case of Christianity involves specific challenges (Marshall, 2014). The anthropology of religion has become increasingly aware of how much of the supposedly “objective” tool kit of comparative concepts comes from Christian traditions and Christian ideas of what a “religion” is supposed to be (Hoskins, 2014).

Considering Christianity Holy Bible is the centre of the sources. The word “Christ” means anointed one. Christ is not Jesus’ last name. Jesus is the anointed one from God the Father who came to this world, fulfilled the Old Testament laws and prophecies, died on the cross, and rose from the dead physically. He performed many miracles, which were recorded in the Gospels by the eyewitnesses. He is divine in nature as well as human. Thus, He has two natures and is worthy of worship and prayer (O’uioiais ysñ” 2004).

This research was carried out under the research problem of how cultural diffusionism effected the Sri Lankan Christianity and what are the new trends and challenges caused by it. Considering the main objective of this research is to utilize the anthropology of religion knowledge to study about religions and understand the cultural anthropological perspective in religious studies. To provide a comprehensive knowledge on Sri Lankan Christianity is a specific objective of the study. Considering the previous studies conducted through the dimensions of Christian communities, insufficient of cultural anthropological perspective can be identified. Therefore, this research attempts to fill the gap in Sri Lankan anthropological point of view in Christian cultural aspects as well their behaviors.

When considering about the subjective value, this whole research was based on socio-cultural anthropology as well as the anthropology of religion. Through this research the researchers can identify about the theoretical valid and the practical usage of those aspects. Every natural science, social science depends on the development of knowledgeable consequences. Through these types of researches those knowledges can develop and clearly identify about misplaces of those works. When clearly stating about this research it’s a significance process of understanding a particular social and cultural

element. So through this effort, future researchers also can perfectly sort out their topics and other phenomenon from this project. When consider about practical importance of this research, through this research the society can identify about the hidden characteristics of Christian beliefs and rituals and their modern features. So it's quite importance and significance identify those cultural elements and other factors. This research is quite important for policy makers in government and private sectors. They can clearly identify about the characteristics those denominations and their beliefs as well as their rituals. So through those features those sectors can make proper policies and other facilities for those communities. It's very important to have a proper idea about these societies and their needs to accomplish government and private development projects.

Methodology

This research attends to explore about the evolutionary aspects of modern Christianity utilizing Chilaw as the research area. Justifying the reason for selecting Chilaw, is that it plays one of the prominent roles in Sri Lankan Catholic communities. To fulfil the objectives the researcher selected 3 churches from respective area and 40 amount of sample along with 4 categories of data contributors as fathers, brothers, sisters and devotees purposively.

Table 1: research area and sampling aspects

Research area	Purposively selected religious institutions	Purposively selected data contributors	Sample size
Chilaw, Puttalam District, North Western Province, Sri Lanka	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. St. Joseph Church–Chilaw 2. Shrine of Lourdes–Nattandiya 3. St. Joseph's Church–Wennapuwa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fathers ▪ Brothers ▪ Sisters ▪ Devotees 	40 (purposively selected)

Thematic analysis was utilized and qualitative data (as this is a qualitative research) was analyzed and identified the respective findings along with a scientific methodology. Data were collected by unstructured interviews, observation, and participant observation.

This whole study was based on some prominent theories in Socio-Cultural Anthropology like cultural diffusionism, and subculture theory. The main proponents of British school of Diffusionism were Elliot Smith, William J. Perry, and W.H.R Rivers. Generally, the meaning of this theory is the spread of cultural beliefs and social activities from one group of people to another. Consequently, when considering this research, it can clearly identify that people of Chilaw and other mentioned areas who belongs to Christianity gathered the cultural elements that were injected by outside cultures (Example: British colonization). Those cultural behaviors straight connected with this study because we can clearly identify some prominent characteristics from the people through these areas that changed their aspects on Christian belief and rituals (Your Dictionary, 2018). The

concept of subculture has a particularly strong, yet controversial trajectory in the social sciences in general and anthropology. The concept was formulated in early social theory to address a variety of sociocultural forms that are included in a totality, be it society or national culture. These forms could be the subdivisions of national culture, minority groups, immigrant or refugee populations, or rural/ semi-rural communities, for example. Many authors saw subcultures as both “cohesive social systems” and variants of a national culture, cultures within a cultural world. For instance, various community studies of rural populations were conceptualized as completely integrated systems, subcultures that are autonomous from the works of the nation-state.

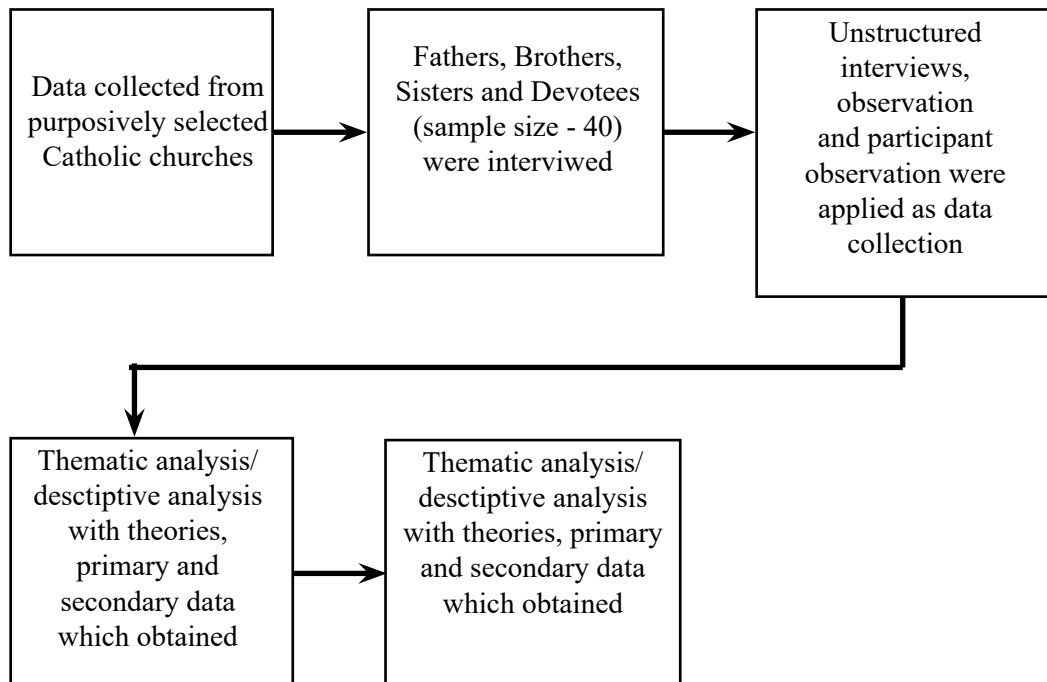


Figure 1: Research framework

Results & Discussion

In *Chilaw* area, through the interviews the researcher identified following types of denominations.

1. Catholic Church
2. Anglican Church
3. Jehovah’s Witnesses
4. The Faith of the “flotsam and jetsam”
5. Bible Church

Catholic Church is the core of world Christianity. According to the interviews of this research, the researcher identified that the belief system of Catholicism is mainly

based on Holy Trinity and the Holy Bible. Majority of the world in Christianity believe in these elements. Additionally, the particular research area includes Anglican, Jehovah Witness, Jetsam, and Bible organization. Anglican Christianity, which stems from the Protestant Reformation, is one of the largest Christian traditions in the world. Moreover, its adherents have often exerted tremendous social and cultural influence, particularly in English-speaking countries. The name “Anglican” means “of England” but the Anglican Church exists worldwide. The Anglican Church, although it has apostolic succession, is separate from the Roman church. The history of Christianity has produced numerous notable separations. In 1054 came the first major split from Roman administration of the church, when the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman split apart. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe God is the Creator and Supreme Being. Witnesses reject the Trinity doctrine, which they consider unscriptural. They view God as the Father, an invisible spirit “person” separates from the Son, Jesus Christ. However, the researcher acquired that the prominent denomination is Jehovah Witness and the core centre known as the prominent Catholicism. Mainly, the prominent beliefs of these two divisions can mention as following.

The researcher found following beliefs as their main doctrines according to the church of Catholic. Trinity is one of their main believe and other than that, belief in Christ’s redemptive death, Jesus is both God and man, salvation by Grace, all men have the possibility of salvation, belief in Sacrifice of the mass, denomination has a valid ordination of priests, fidelity to the Pope as teacher of the faith, belief in the ability of the individual Christian to lose salvation, belief in distinction of sin, belief in equality of Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, Bible canon contains 73 books including all seven books in the Septuagint canon, Baptism is normatively necessary for salvation, and belief in all seven sacraments of the Church are confirmed as prominent beliefs.

Considering the belief system of Catholic Church and Anglican Church, following type of features were identified by the researcher.

Table 2: Comparison of Catholic and Anglican beliefs

Belief	Catholic	Anglican
Trinity	√	√
Belief in Christ’s redemptive death	√	√
Jesus is both God and man	√	√
Salvation by Grace	√	?
All men have the possibility of salvation	√	√
Belief in Sacrifice of the Mass	√	√
Denomination has a valid ordination of Priests	√	X
Denomination has a valid consecration of the Eucharist and belief in the Real Presence	√	X

Fidelity to the Pope as teacher of the Faith	√	X
Fidelity to the Pope as Apostolic Primate	√	X
Belief in the ability of the individual Christian to lose salvation	√	√
Belief in distinction of sin	√	√
Belief in equality of Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition	√	?
Adherence and recognition of all the Church's Ecumenical Councils	√	X
Bible canon contains 73 books including all seven books in the Septuagint canon.	√	?
Baptism is normatively necessary for salvation.	√	√
Belief in all seven sacraments of the Church.	√	√

Interview method used for this research; overall, majority stated that their traditional belief system was not changed.

“Christianity does not change the rituals, worships, liturgical or other methods. We call them Doctrines. They do not change...”

Above-mentioned statement cited from the interview with the father from the Bishop House of Chilaw. He described that several denominations in the world defines the true meaning of Christianity according to their perspective. However, there can be different types of changes through prepared various documents.

“The Pope sends an exhortation paper. There may be differences in things. However; liturgical, rituals and beliefs do not change...”

Through an interview from another father, the researcher found some unique characteristics of Chilaw area Christianity. According to his statements, we can identify that the Christianity in Chilaw filled with unique cultural materials and prominent practices. This particular situation described by the respective father as following.

“Faith is a general thing. Catholicism in the entire world is in one platform. The Holy Trinity is one. There are unique cultural elements in Sri Lankan Christianity as well as Catholicism. Primarily, under the threat of the Dutch, St. Joseph Vaz tries to protect the Christianity in Sri Lanka. During that time, Rev. Fr. Jacome Gonsalves came to Sri Lanka. He is the founder of Sri Lankan Christian literature. His arrival will bring new things to Sri Lankan literature and culture. For example, the Song of the Psalms can be mentioned. The Chilaw area is very well known. In addition, he introduces dramas as a unique characteristic of Sri Lankan Christianity.”

Through this description, we can identify that the general belief system of Christianity is not changing easily but there can be different types of cultural elements and practices that adding to the core concept of Christianity. According to the theory of Cultural Diffusionism, these practices were acquired by Sri Lankan society. It is not a doubt to state that when the complex society is change numerous materials and practices are adding to any system of beliefs. According to the interviews of Christian devotees, following types of ideas were found.

“Traditional system of beliefs is not changing. As our grandparents today also, we come to the church on Sunday and participating religious observances...”

“No. The beliefs are not changing. As well as the ancient times people stick with the church and faith for the Christ is still in a good line...”

“There are no massive changes of evolutions in Christianity in this area. People still gather in church for their faith and respect. Doctrine is not changing...”

More than half of the interviewers stated that their traditional belief system is not changed. However, some argued that there were some changes occurred after the second Vatican council. Second Vatican Council, 21st ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church, announced by Pope John XXIII on 1959, as a means of spiritual renewal for the church and as an occasion for Christians separated from Rome to join in search for reunion. Authority, church, ecumenism, liturgy, and Roman Catholicism are some key topics that discussed in this council. The “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” establishes the principle of greater participation by the laity in the celebration of mass and authorizes significant changes in the texts, forms, and language used in the celebration of mass and the administration of the sacraments. In early rituals and practices of Christian society performed by using Latin as the official language. At that context, devotees did not connect rapidly with the church because they are not familiar with the language. After the Second Vatican Council, Christian administration agreed to perform the rituals and other practices from native language.

“The basic core system of Christianity has not changed. Different decisions were made, however, after the Second Vatican Council. One of the main reasons for this council was to discuss the challenges and action to face the main challenges, problems of Catholic Church. At that time, the Catholic Church was fierce enough to kill those who caused scientific revival. The whole of Christianity itself had a black stain due to these activities. In this congregation, the authorities made number of flexible decisions. They agreed to carry out rituals in their own language. Many of those who left the church eventually joined in due to this decision.”

According to the above-mentioned statement of a Reverent Father, we can identify that these types of changes caused directly as a prominent path for the development of Christianity in Sri Lanka. Other than these decisions, there were several activities that popular area in present days.

- Catholic people organize Dansals on Vesak Poya day.
- Giving beverages and other facilities during a Buddhist Perahera.
- Educational and economical supports for every type of groups.

Once a devotee point out the importance of Roman Catholicism which means, why should be important to be a Roman Catholic. To provide the information he cited apart from the Holy Bible as following.

“Go then to all people everywhere and make them disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey everything I have commanded to you. And remember, I will be with you always to the end of age.”(Mt.28:19-20).

According to the statement of the interviewer, following types of major points achieved as the significant characteristics of Catholicism.

- If the teachings of your Church differ from those Catholic Church, you can be sure that they are not of Christ but of another man.
- The Catholic Church gave to the world the Holy Bible with its collection of 73 books, which contains written and oral traditions.
- If reading the Bible alone is sufficient, how could those who lived before the Bible was printed and those who cannot read be saved?
- A study made in the Philippines reveals that there are approximately 30,000 different Christian sects and cults in the world. All these sects and cults have mushroomed only since the late 19th century. Can they all be right? There can be only one truth.

When stating about the conflict of Christian conflicts between these denominations of Chilaw area different types of opinions found through interviews. Various data resources stated various statements according to their faith. Following descriptions were present by these interviewers.

“No. There is no such thing. All teams are united. In Chilaw area several occasions are organizing by all of us...”

“It does not matter. However, various religions are conducting conversions around. There are bad images about each community due to these actions. At times, law and order violations occur...”

“Jehovah Witness is one of the main group that doing conversions around. Other than these organizations, Bible Group also conducting different programs to convert Catholic people into their religion...”

“Although there are usually no serious levels of Christianity among the Christian groups, the process of religious conversion is common in the area. As a result, there

are issues between Catholic and other fundamentalist groups. As an example, Jehovah Witness visit house to house in Mudukattuwa area and once they visited for a Catholic house and tried to convert them into Jehovah by providing various financial and other facilities. Catholic people got impulsive due to these activities; there was a conflict between particular groups. This situation was increased into civil law circumstances. So, there can be different types of conflicts because of these fundamentalist group activities... ”

“There are no conflicts between Christian denominations and every group of this area united and participating similar religious activities...”

Another level of serious conflict occurs between the clergy and laity of some mainline a few liberal denominations. Many church members have been brought up to believe in heaven and in the literal truth of Jesus’ virgin birth, divinity, and resurrection. Some believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, and other historical beliefs. However, most clergy have attended theological colleges, and many have developed personal beliefs that reflect current liberal Biblical scholarship. They reject many of the traditional doctrines of the church. This produces a conflict among clergy, between their need to preach the truth as they see it, and their need to support the basic beliefs of their denomination and avoid controversy. In particular, area conflicts between these denominations are not in serious platform. The Vatican’s October announcement of a special process to admit Anglicans to the Roman Catholic Church raised questions for many who perhaps thought that “crossing the Tiber” would require a major shift in belief for Anglicans. The relationship between Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism, however, has always been somewhat different from the other Catholic-Protestant divides, which may make it easier for Anglicans to find a home in the Roman communion. Over the centuries, Anglicans have generally rejected the concepts of transubstantiation and papal infallibility and considered the Marian dogmas of Immaculate Conception and Assumption to be without sufficient warrant in scripture and tradition. Beginning in 1970, however, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission has worked toward common statements of agreement on these topics. As late as the 1980s, there was some hope that the Church of England (if not the entire Anglican Communion) would enter full communion with Rome. Catholics and Jehovah’s Witnesses differ in many other teachings such as that related with afterlife. Catholics believe in eternal hell, heaven, and temporal purgatory. Good people would be allowed to enter the heavens by St. Peter and bad people would be forever punished in hell. On the other hand, Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that after death, the dead person would not feel, see, or experience anything until Jehovah’s Judgment Day, wherein a war would take place between Jehovah and his enemy Satan the devil. After that event, all dead people would rise from the graves and be with their loved ones again.

Considering the difference between the faith of youth and old generations, following statements provided by the interviewers. These answers are provided according to the ‘are there any differences between the faith of youth and old generations?’

“Normally there is a huge gap between the participation of religious observances in the church and old generation is usually connected with the church in every Sunday...”

“There is no difference between these two generations. There are youth organizations and elder organizations in the Church, which actively participate in various projects. Therefore, there are no reduction in the participation of youth and old generations...”

“Due to the complex society young, as well as the old ones are moving away from the Church. I think busy life is the main reason for these reduced participations...”

When consider about the main reasons for these reductions particular interviewers point out following types of statements.

- Busy life.
- Breakdown of the family.
- Militant secularism.
- Lack of spiritual authenticity among adults.
- The church’s cultural influence has diminished.
- The rise of a fad called “atheism.”

Considering the final statements of interviewers, following types of table can provide according to the research topic of Christian beliefs and their changes. Only five devotees were stated that the Christian belief are changed after the Second Vatican Council. Reverent Fathers also stated about the changes of Christian rituals and three of them agreed to it. Only two sisters were agreed for the statement and five of the devotees also agree with it. Majority stated that the whole system of Christian belief system and ritual system is not changed

Table 3: Number of interviewers according to statements

Interviewers	Christian beliefs are changed	Christian Rituals are changed	Christian beliefs and rituals are not changed
Fathers	-	3	2
Sisters	-	2	3
Brothers	-	-	5
Devotees	5	5	15

Conclusion

The study concluded that there had been no widespread alteration in the basic beliefs and values of the Catholic population in the area. Nevertheless, the decisions of the parishes of the Catholic Church in the past have confirmed the rise and fall of the present Catholic religion. New trends are emerging in contemporary Catholic society due to diffusionism as well as the popular culture that is emerging. Among these trends the participation of non-believers in various religious activities is prominent and significant.

Denominations of this area become a noticeable problem for Catholic Church because they perform conversion activities for people as well as native Catholics. Due to complex society and social and cultural change, busy life, there is a trend of moving away from spiritual life, although still people connected with the Church and participate in religious practices.

Chilaw diocese is well administrated by the authority and every father, sister, and brother is perfectly trained and educated to spread the religion around the area; although comparing with other denominations, families for Catholic Church have very large amount a due to these family's amount, fundamentalists have the perfect ability to spread their religion among these population.

As previously stated, diffusionism affected the modern-day Christianity of Sri Lanka as Catholicism, the main Christian denomination arise with popular practices. Although comparing to Popular Buddhism of Sri Lanka, Catholicism changes gradually. This research emphasize the importance of studying Christianity in Sri Lankan context and the importance of applying anthropological knowledge to identify the cultural aspects of a particular religion.

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