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CHRISTIANITY IN POSTMODERN
TIMES

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Key Words

Modernization, modernity, historical fundamentals, modern philosophy, disenchantment of the world, secularization, religion, imaginary, paradigm, postmodernism, post modernity, sects, new religious movements, new age, Christian tradition, dechristianization, Christian pastoral mission, contemporary theological patterns, Christian apologetics, morality, bioethics, ecumenism, political imaginary, imaginary of the family and re-christianization.

Summary

Our research project is designed as a complex interrogation of the historical context, of the philosophical and axiomatic premises upon which what we generically call modernity and post modernity has been structured, and likewise, of the ratio between modernity and post modernity and the historic and philosophical dialogue between them, as they are being projected at the symbolic level of structures of the imaginary, and still more so in a deep analysis of the dynamics and reconfiguration of the *Christian religion in postmodern times*. We will try to valorize these realities through an epistemic effort of hermeneutical understanding which will acquire a double tendency and meaning; a first positioning in the historical and cultural context in order to accomplish a comprehensive genetic acceptance of the analyzed cultural phenomena and in the same time a placement away from the major *signs, images and symbols* of the religious and cultural displays, noticeable in the close reality and projected in the structures of the imaginary.

Due to the impressive *expansion* of the *referential domain*, of the *significant importance of the subject*, and likewise, of the *profound diversity of the traditions and current forms of Christianity*, as well as due to the interdisciplinary *complexity* imposed by the amplexness of the analyzed cultural phenomenon, we have bounded and restricted our interest domain, in the case of the present research, only to the European cultural environment, without denying the interrelation of certain phenomena which overlap this referential frame whose implications tend to be global. Meanwhile, from a certain standpoint, if we consider European civilization as having been for centuries in a row the European environment which has been self-constituted as a real “centre of the world”, pattern through which it has been self-depicted, actually an *imago mundi*, then our analysis transcends the European geographical and cultural space, developing into a much larger, trans-European perspective.

Restricting the conceptual dimension and extension of our research theme from a global dimension which integrates all of the local subcomponents of the worldwide extension, beyond compare, of the Christian religion, takes into account the fact that this kind of analysis represents a cultural project which needs a longer research time, a huge effort of data gathering, analysis and synthesis, as well as outstanding intellectual labor and without doubt, a research work which builds itself through team work. The global analysis dimension of the postmodern Christianity dynamics, compulsorily claims a large interdisciplinary methodological frame, much more complex than what a simple researcher might offer, which can create opportunities for valuing certain ultra-specialized thematic fields, relevant enough, yet without losing the view of the phenomenon, and likewise, the integrative comprehensive perspective and the supple hermeneutics, multidimensional, of a hardly imaginable and unfeasible range. We have tried through these initial methodological boundaries, to mention the real limits of our hermeneutic effort, without stating the practical impossibility and the outstanding intellectual challenge offered by such a synthetic approach, while still observing the reasonable possibilities and the edge points that have marked out the systemic and perfectly created path of our methodological endeavor that we wanted to bring forth and to support it through this research.

In order to project our discursive effort, we are aware of the need of noticing the motivating character and the intellectual challenge, as well as the inherent systemic difficulty offered by the diversity of approaches and attempts to understand postmodern Christian destiny. European culture was built beyond any hermeneutical artifice starting with the inheritance of Judeo-Christian tradition, grafted upon the Roman Greek inheritance and the entire dynamics of European civilization along the pre-modernity, modernity and post-modernity path entails a necessary awareness and a pre-comprehension capable of rendering its true and entire meaning.

The objective of our introspection was focused upon the understanding of the amazing wealth of Christian tradition, of the dynamics of its cultural forms, noticed in the world of the display of the imaginary, through a genetically rebuilt position inside the analyzed realities, and especially through a permanent dialogue between the *Christian religious imaginary* and various culturally symbolic structures of *modernity and late modernity*. Our hermeneutic lens was designed to be as complex as possible, functioning in the same time from a historic, theological, anthropological and philosophical point of view, without claiming to possess an exhaustive solving determination, desiring to enter the universe of the imaginary, while being

aware that any attempt at understanding and knowledge of any epoch's reality and eventually of the *tangible*, has to operate with its perceptions and representations, thus opening itself to the *mundus imaginalis*.

From our perspective, in the possible and difficult attempt to clarify and understand the cultural phenomenology of modernity, it is absolutely necessary for it to be analyzed beyond the facts of the tangible, of the transmitted acts and ideas and to descend deeper into the world of representation and production of the imaginary. The imaginary is a system of symbolic structures and representations, a “*dynamic logic of building images*”, a type of *immaterial bridge*, but real in the same time, between us and the world, between the profound universe of our identity and the diversity of other's reality. It can be stated that the imaginary represents *the map* with which we read and *interpret* the universe and the world around us, because European philosophical modernity has proven that reality and the tangible are irreducible and indistinguishable dimensions from an empirical point of view, and that we are able to know reality and the tangible through perception, representations and ideas organized in communicational codes, mythical and symbolic networks, conceptual systems and in imaginary structures. The research on the imaginary have emphasized the fact that *our entire system of connections with the world passes through images*, the image being an environment through which we are able to see and understand reality. The image, seen as archetype of representation, is to be understood as sign and symbol, setting itself up as an unavoidable mediator in the process of communicating any human experience. The sum of the productions of representing and imagining designed by human intellect should become, in our opinion, an important discursive element in an analysis of the desired type in the case of the present research, which can thus facilitate the desire to penetrate beyond the brute expression of reality, in the inner depth of emotions, uneasiness, phantasms, obsessions, beliefs and hopes of the people belonging to an era. Therefore, we believe that studying the imaginary in general and of the modern and postmodern Christian religious imaginary in particular, as an essential foundation of a specific culture, proves to be a capable frame for rendering meanings and of producing a more authentic comprehension of the complexity and diversity of the “anthropological path” of the postmodern man, upon which our pondering spirit lays its own anxiety. Our research has therefore wanted to be designed as an interrogation and a complex analysis of *the imaginary of Christian religiousness in postmodern times* and of the *connection between Christianity and postmodernism*. Late modernity or postmodernism is, above all, a cultural thesis whose goal surpasses by far the cultural domain, becoming an issue

of *cultural paradigm* inside which history, society, values and human existence itself are situated and interpreted. Postmodernism was and is grasped differently in academic and cultural circles; from the image of *an intellectual caprice* to that of *a typhoon of modernity* or even a new historical and cultural epoch, different and opposed to that of modernity.

The analysis of the complex phenomenon of *postmodern Christianity*, is without doubt an exercise that is very difficult to accomplish due to the various dimensions from the sphere of the tangible and the imaginary that the Christian religion and religiosity imply, but also due to the various symbolic and imaginary structures, continuously produced by the various discursive instances, communicated on the cultural and social level by many religious forms and traditions. A primary analysis of the fundamental images and symbols of the postmodern Christian religiosity prove their convergence and unity of meaning, continuous redesign of the dynamics specific to the dialectics of the sacred and profane. However, it can equally be stated in the register of reception a great morphologic, ritualistic and cultural diversity of the Christian religious traditions. One of the theoretic goals of our research was the analysis of the *dialogue* and of the ratio between *the secularization phenomenon* in general and that of *dechristianization* in particular manifested in the last decade society and culture and the complex phenomenon of resacralization which has also promoted the new neo-pagan religious trends and of the way in which these phenomena build and project their symbolic images and structures which work with changes in the dimension of the postmodern imaginary.

From the point of view the structure and unrolling of the discursive sequences, our endeavor was focused in a first chapter on a sequence destined to describe the methodological frame, a necessary partition and a conceptual and methodological explanation inside which we have outlined the theoretical frame, inside which we have tried to operate with the pre-comprehensive premises from where we started and a more emphasized statement of the component approaches from the domain of the imaginary. After this short step designed for methodological, we have designed a first chapter for analysis designed to define the concept of *modernity* and to build a dialogue between modernity and Christianity. The analysis was meant to be an interrogation on the *origins of the genesis and the historical and philosophical bases of modernity, defined as a fundamental West European process*. A specific aspect which was emphasized is the interdependence connection between the cultural phenomena called *modernization, disenchantment of the world and secularization*. The objective of our introspection was focused on the understanding of the modernization process as a specific change of Western culture and civilization at the end of the Middle Ages through the changes

made by the Renaissance and especially by the Protestant Reform. Our perspective was concentrated on the *secularization* phenomenon which took place throughout modernity as well as upon the patterns and explanatory theories suggested by first class thinkers about the mechanisms employed by secularization. Starting from the secularization phenomenology we have tried to ask ourselves about the dialogue between Christian tradition and the phenomenon of dechristianization, as a specific, recent phenomenon, found inside of the Christian religion.

The following chapter focused on the relationship between *religion* and *imaginary* in the postmodern world, explored through the viewpoint of *defining* the basic concepts, of presenting *the great modern discursive system* and of the comprehension model of the concepts of *postmodernism* and *postmodernity*. The postmodern religious imaginary introduces wide-spread phenomena, so that, in addition to the theological models proclaimed by the Christian churches and generally by the great religions, new specific conditions emerge, in which a *new religiousness* blossoms, a diffuse and hybrid one, which very easily blends in an unequalled postmodern syncretism, elements of different religious traditions. After we marked out methodologically a system of pre-comprehensive hermeneutical concentric circles, observing the vectors and inter-determinative mechanisms, in chapter IV we came in the study of a few imaginary representations, already situated in a cultural context, such as *secularisation*, and from this perspective we study the dynamic relationship between the *Christian tradition* in the European countries and the de-Christianisation of postmodern culture and civilisation, and the entire universe of conditioning and relationships that this phenomenon establishes.

Our thesis later introduces a diagnosis of the postmodern era and presents the pastoral and pastoral-missionary answers that the Christian church lays out by a defense mechanism and the means by which the religious representations have managed to acknowledge the evolution of the major structures of ecclesiastic models and especially of theological systems emerged as a consequence of postmodern theological thought. The next landmark on our imaginary map was the capacity of Christian churches in Europe to make a pastoral-missionary effort by which to respond to the dramatic changes and to the current cultural complexities. The content of the matter is especially revealed in the section dedicated to the relationship between *church and the present society*, where the *catechetical and mystagogic effort of the Christian church* and especially the major theologies of the past decades play an essential role by which the discursive instances create an environment for the development,

renewing or blocking of the sacramental-liturgical ecclesiastic life, which reflects mainly upon the collective and individual identity structures, the moral behaviours and the social values of *Europa Christiana*. The Church has proven overtime that it is also capable of a revitalization in the apologetic sphere, even though the structures of globalization and of informational society essentially changes the axiological components and the constituent limits of ethical values. The Church succeeds, though not much in some of its branches, to raise the challenge of a *reflexive interrogation* of society and its leaders, in order to understand the axiological implications of scientific and technical contemporary research. The Christian church assents to censor to a certain extent the colossal effort of the peripheral sciences in late modernity, stating the *sacredness of life* and trying to legitimize the anthropological condition according to the primary data of the Christian vision.

One of the most disputed phenomena, but highly significant, that takes place in the postmodern era, is the *Christian dialogue* that the ecumenical movement generates, which creates important apologetic consequences and makes Christianity conclusive again and re-creates the *conceivability structures* for the acceptance of the Christian message in the European postmodern Areopagus. I have assigned a large extent to the study of the *ecumenical movement* phenomenon, which in our opinion has a strong restoring potential for the organization and strengthening of the Christian identity in the European civilization. Among the systemic causes, secularization and de-Christianization also had this wide-spread scandal over the last centuries, among the different Christian denominations which were incapable of communication and which anathematized more or less mutually. In the next chapter entitled “Christianity and postmodern imaginary”, I tried to examine the dynamic of the relationship between the Christian church and the political structures over a period that begins in pre-modernity, attends modernity and abides in post-Christian postmodern civilization. The postmodern politic imaginary processes the image of the efforts of the Church to form a *dialogue with the citadel*, during the dissolving of political ideologies, to legitimate a democratic organization of the state, peaceful affairs and a reconfiguration of laws, so that the roots of Christian tradition will not be hybridized and produce mutations which are difficult to recognize within the European civilization. The place and cultural image of the individual, the *representations of alterities, the images and religious symbols* reflected on the social level, examined in facts and gestures capable to form symbols to understand the values and beliefs of the postmodern man, represent the stake of the following reflections and considerations.

Our approach has tried to bring back the understanding of the dynamic between *identity* and *alterity*, attempting to examine the general evolutions as well as the new elements, that the postmodern man imagines and represents as being the self distinct from the “other”. This is the very “anthropologic journey” that the postmodern man undertakes in search of his own identity. We complete our retracing and hermeneutic effort introducing some imaginary structures from the *postmodern family*, which in our opinion observes at a micro-social and cultural level the real structure of the social field and which are the axiological mutations of the postmodern man and their relationship with the entirety of the judeo-christian heritage.

Delivering the modern initial situations our intercession has been oriented towards problematic family incorporation in the world of the imaginary, understanding that we did not tend to have a chronologically approach of the family, but more, a rake out of the update of the archetypal and mythical structures of unities into the postmodern human conscience, of the structure that invests a certain form of the family, notwithstanding the fact that they certainly translate the „partnership degree” of the nowadays human being at the religious fundamental human values. We affirm in the score of our research, testing out the precedent hypothesis, that the postmodern is „the fragmentation epoch” and, in order to highlight this we chose a durable analysis of the imaginay , the unit of the archetype, represented and updated in history by the family situations, a symbol of subtle relationships which define the man of any epoch. The mutations from the relations area and family structure significantly illustrate the changes suffered by human beings nowadays.

The circle of our endeavour could not be closed without also trying a perspective upon the hope of the imaginary detected as a re – sanctification of the European civilization imaginary, through a huge effort which the Christian church could and knew how to carry on. A projection into the future could not be missed and though it is always dangerous the hope is a constituent factor of the nature of the human being. The analysis has surprised some observations concerning the efforts upon the re – sanctification of the european Christian churches’ space and the possibilities of instauration of a new postmodern Christianity. Although the complexity of the globalized world, of the informational society does not easily allow the acts to be precisely programmed creating many inter – determinations that we will only be able to present in the future, and the hope will represent the entire Chritian church road towards there.

There is no doubt that this kind of incursion represents a subjective methodological frame with which we worked and which presents a single perspective upon the complexity of the phenomenon represented by the Christian religious imaginary of postmodernism, of the identity and values of the postmodern man. Due to these reasons our analysis does not have the assertion exhaustivity itself trying to demonstrate, to build an image that is as close as possible to the requirements of postmodernist Christianity. The analysis of the atlas of representations and of the universe of Christian religion imaginary has facilitated more and more our understanding of the specific condition and extraordinary complexity of the postmodern man. Beyond his daily, immediate, materialistic, hedonistic, and consumerist wishes, beyond the fact that the informational world has transformed its existence into a virtual one, and the communication technology from the globalization era has transformed his social values and the way in which he relates to others, and even if the *civilization of the word* is assaulted by the *civilization of the image*, the *European postmodern man* remains a *homo religiosus* in constant search and maintenance of its own identity.

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