

Summary

The present controversy over religion is not only philosophical; it is first of all political. Predictions about the "end of religion," or its replacement by some social utopia have proven false. The human mind, willingly or unwillingly, still refers to the invisible side of existence. It is unable to abandon or overcome "the aporia of a different world". Only committed materialists reject (at least at the level of declaration) the thesis about the supernatural character of religion, believing that it is a product of some specific conditions of the earthly infrastructure or the human condition. For them, religion is merely a natural phenomenon that can be analyzed in many different ways.

Other thinkers, influenced by contemporary discoveries that undermine Christianity, accept the existence of religion as such, even admitting its transcendent foundation. Categories like "creation", "original sin", "Son of God", are held to have lost their religious value; they are out of date and lack scientific transparency. The demise of classical metaphysics has made the question of the philosophical foundations of Christianity problematic, while modern historical methodology calls the historical nature of Christianity into question. Many postmodernists suggest that the content of Christian religion should be read symbolically. Christianity is a myth, alongside other myths in the history of religion. Religious experience must be interpreted in categories applicable to similar experiences. One can remain Christian and use Christian forms of expression, although the meanings of these claims have fundamentally changed. Truth has now become a culture-based form of expressing the overall religious feeling. For this reason, the postmodern turn to religion is significant. What does reflection about religion mean after the collapse of the Enlightenment and the end of metaphysics?

SUMMARY

To answer these questions, postmodern thinking about religion must be outlined. It turns out that the sources of the postmodern return to religion in Derrida, Vattimo, Deleuze or Vitiello are primarily Kant and Nietzsche, and more existentially, Augustine, Pascal, and Kierkegaard. Kant moved the problem of God from the ontological order into the sphere of morality. Religion lost its confession-related roots and expanded to embrace the universal dimensions of the religion of humanity. Nietzsche stirred up a literal "sea of interpretation", and in a way forced repeated reflection over issues that were previously regarded as settled. Nietzsche became the master of suspicion who could lead the way toward a rethinking of Christian doctrine. His formula about the death of God developed into a research tool in the deliberations of Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion. God could not die, but the conceptual idol of God did. On the other hand, the postmodern authors are interested in subjectivistic philosophies of religion, especially in the notion of faith as a personal choice and intimate union with an indefinable God. While many postmodernist descriptions of the phenomenon of religion are problematic, the renewed interest in religion in postmodernism is significant and deserves careful examination.

Postmodernism appears to be returning to a mid 17th century concept of religion, to a natural religion with a messianic touch. The phenomenon of religiousness is formulated by the subject itself, who considers as religious everything that satisfies his/her so-called spiritual needs. It is therefore of no importance whether the object of religious relation exists or not, whether it is perceived as a person or rather as a non-personal being. What counts is the mere fact of internal attention, without any firm ecclesiastical institutional binding or dogmatic foundation. The need for a saving God is not at all assumed by such thinking. It is sufficient to discover the mystery of the human being without any traces of God. Thus, religion becomes a kind of therapy, a spiritual empowerment of people. Religion has no definite message and leaves us to our own devices.

The postmodernists wish to overcome the traditional Christian understanding of religion. No one can claim the right to speak on behalf of the so-called objective truth. There is nothing left but deconstruction. The lack of an absolute vision of reality seems to be doomed to subjectivism. What is left is tragic faith in the style of Pascal or Kierkegaard. Therefore, philosophy takes religion out of the order of confession, and places it in the order of politics. Derrida refers to Messianism. If the course of histo-

ry is not subjected to the principles of reason, then the assumption that a Messiah may appear to change the unjust reality is justified. If the foundations of the philosophy of presence are undermined, (the correspondent theory of truth, the impossibility of reaching reality, and the necessity of deconstruction), one can emphasize the “future” dimension and a pragmatic justification of religion as an expression of expectation and will to action. If the sanction for preaching truth is ethical, one cannot neglect the call to moral revival and justice. Additionally, if one claims that scientific treatises are variations of literature, then the “great narration” of Messianism is as justified as Cartesian epistemology, Hegel’s philosophy of history, Freud’s Oedipus complex, or Marx’s dialectic materialism. This procedure, however, has no connection with revealed religion or with a personal God. It operates on the level of faith in interpersonal solidarity and the prophetic transformation of the world. The Messianic power of local communities is pointedly emphasized in the works of Rorty and Bauman. Here we are not dealing with Messianism as much as the “collapse of Messianism”, backed by Kant’s program for universal peace and Hegel’s thesis about the end of history.

The postmodern departure from the Christian understanding of religion is a lamentable step. The eclectic vision of religion is a result of confessed philosophical assumptions. It has the “titanic” character: The titanic subject builds its own god and gnostically assigns it a dogmatic shape and some moral content. For this reason, it is no longer possible to distinguish self-deception from the experience of a true and personal God. We are then left to our faith in future justice, trust that people will “do good and avoid evil”. Since traditional religion requires responsibility and actions consistent with the revealed doctrine, it is preferable to surrender to the “specialists” in advertising, globalization, and psychoanalytical sessions.

As a result, a peculiar theory of religion has been consolidated, in which the subject and object of religious experience are identified with each other. The personal God of the European tradition has been replaced by “low flying God”, created by mass media and an “internal human Kingdom of Heaven”. Here the divinity of the human being is equivalent to various interpretations of internal subjectivity. This divinity remains an inborn property of the human nature, deformed in the postmodern culture, and thus needing a “transformation of consciousness” in order to come back to the source of perfection. Consequently, the only source of truth is the “internal voice”. Religion becomes a space

of spiritual freedom and moral impressionism. No wonder its authors are actually unable to agree on the subject matter of religion as such. They revive more and more metaphors of religious origin into "semantic life", and cannot (or actually do not want to) overcome them. They believe that a metaphor does not listen to the conventional voice of the era and prepares ground for the future event, namely the rise of a new religion of spirit, inspired by visions and philosophical reflections upon the history of Joachim of Fiore or other reformers. The postmodern authors persist in repeating that as long as "gods do not change, nothing will change". Thus, the religion of Derrida or Deleuze and their successors is a kind of cultural mystification, even a form of concealed atheism.

Certainly, one should not take offence at the atmosphere and signs of postmodern sensitivity. The point is rather to make sure that the acceptance of ways leading to the authentic contact with the reality does not lead to relativism, cynicism or violence. As a matter of fact, truth does not generate antagonism. The God of the Gospel remains the God of postmodern authors, as it was God of Abraham, Augustine or Aquinas.

Thus, one may hope that this report on postmodern texts might bring some fruit. It might strengthen intellectual vigilance and criticism of the author and the potential readers. It might also consolidate the awareness that even though what is most important in life, in fact, as Derrida points out, occurs as a gift and pure hospitality, it becomes possible not as the impossible, but rather as a consequence of God's kindness. Revealed religion brings hope of real salvation and invites us to make the effort to become worthy of the redemption we have already been given. Any other form of religion is less than human. For human hope cannot be restricted to religious utopias and various transgressional mystical ecstasies. The human being understands himself only in the face of the merciful God. The firmness of this statement does not mean that the creative effort of searching must be ceased. We remain *in via*. This is not a way running through a desert, but through the earth, created by God, who never forgets his creation. Suspicious about truth, secular proposals of many representatives of the postmodern culture cannot change this joyful message.