

Counterfeits of Religiosity in Postmodernism

We live in a society that we used to call postmodern, because the historical period that followed Modernity was different from the previous one because of its religious specificity and not only.

The postmodern mentality is characterized by an extraordinary dynamism, a continuous fluidity, and it seems that very few things are solid in a society subject to permanent transformation. Thus, pluralism is one of the features of postmodern spirituality, as is the plurality of truths, each having its own truth. The postmodern man simply chooses one of the many variants available.

Another feature of Postmodernism is the religious disorientation of the secularized man, who has lost his spiritual marks, but who seeks to satisfy his religious thirst by virtue of his being sacred. Having no access to the authentic faith, which he has just repudiated, the postmodern man comes to embrace surrogates for religiosity, and thus adopts religious behaviors in spaces that were previously considered utterly profane; on the stadium, in the mall, in the virtual space, etc., which thus become, for him, sacred places.

The postmodern man cannot be analyzed without mentioning the impact that technology has on him, a technology that leads to individualization and standardization, to the isolation of the self, although the positive aspects of the use of technology are known. Unfortunately, without always being aware, post-modern virtual world users use technology as an isolation vehicle, communication not automatically leading to interpersonal communion, replacing face-to-face meetings with virtual relationships, thus contributing to the gradual atomization of their disorganized world. Therefore, it can be stated that in postmodern societies the logic of specific existence is that of individualism. Thus, in Postmodernism the religion is passed from the private to the public sphere via the Internet, and the

individual experiences are transformed into collective experiences.

Due to its specific of being a virtual space and transcending the body, geographical and temporal space, the digital world is a sphere of the spirit, where time and space are no longer limited, having an anarchic dimension, extremely attractive for the postmodern spiritual seekers. In the digital space fluidity and not stability is the norm, being a relatively free space from the constraints involved in the seen society. In this fluid and free space, even religious authority is deeply contested. In the virtual space everything is under the imprint of the ephemeral, the transient.

Cyberspace is synonymous with the sacralization of technology, with a rebirth of the sacred, with a “bewitching” of the secularized man especially from the West, people seeing on the Internet a new metaphor for God, as David Lyon expressed. This space, as Margaret Wertheim states, can be considered a technological substitute for heaven, a space of the soul, a utopian arena of equality, friendship and virtues. For loyal users, cyberspace becomes an idealized realm, beyond the problems of the material world, transforming them into a sacred space, a substitute for the temple of the modern world.

Another feature of postmodernism is man’s temptation to delve deeper into hedonistic materialism, as an expression of the spiritual crisis he is going through. In Postmodernism there has been a radical change, making the transition from production to consumption, the activity of consuming becoming the main integrative activity. If in Modernism you were what you worked for, in Postmodernism you are what you buy, the supermarket, the mall becoming some of the temples of humanity, and the advertising industry shapes the thinking of man in such a way that he becomes seduced by the prospect of being a consumer. For this industry, the world is a huge network of possibilities. David L. Roy says that malls today have become true cathedrals of commerce in a market religion, presenting a wide range of commercial products in an enchanting architectural environment for those crossing the threshold, and Jonathan Smith believes that malls confuses the visitor to manipulate him using natural and religious symbols that produce a labyrinth effect by reorienting their “pilgrims” to satisfy the wish by acquiring a sacred thing or experience. Malls generally do not have exterior windows so when entering, shoppers can disconnect from the outside space and be completely and exclusively focused on the experience of the “sacred” time spent there. The mall’s architecture

Counterfeits of Religiosity in Postmodernism

makes possible the experiences of water, light, nature, music, etc., which, combined with the experience of the maze, makes its visitors feel captivated, amazed, disoriented and shopping. We can talk about a true axis of the world, a center of existence of the mall marked by a “cosmic tree” (living trees placed in the middle of the construction) located in the middle of “primordial waters” (artesian fountains) and surrounded by movable stairs that take you to the Center. The mall also has a calendar that can be compared to the religious man’s liturgical calendar, a series of celebrations marked by ceremonies based on the consumption of certain products: Black Friday, the day with the biggest discounts over the year, Valentine’s Day, Halloween, and so on. Also, the advertising panels of the mall can easily be considered true simulacra of the icons.

All these manifestations of postmodern religiosity are merely surrogates of a religiosity that has lost its compass and which only with great difficulty can be categorized as such. They satisfy the sacred thirst of man, his character as a religious being, homo religiosus or homo adorans, but they betray the debasing of contemporary man.

Rev. Caius CUȚARU