

WHEN THE SON OF MAN COMES, WILL HE FIND FAITH ON EARTH? (LUK.18.8.)

Christian Faith in Post-Modern Times

by Bernard Coster

Postmodernism and post-modernity are words that point to certain cultural phenomena of the second part of the 20th century, which are related to the acceleration of culture from the 1960s onwards that still have no definitive explanation. The words themselves, because of their suggestive force, are part of the phenomena that are called postmodern. Sometimes it seems that they establish their own phenomena. They are not conclusions, but working hypotheses by which we can investigate certain cultural expressions. Their function is that of a magnet that separates and isolates certain phenomena, to observe the analogy and the commonness of them. Can we attribute to them the same causality, the same morality, spirituality, can we explain them from the same root? Because of this magnet function, postmodernism is an overloaded and empty word. There is a tendency to group too many phenomena under its title: literature, art, theatre, architecture, philosophy, history, religion, media. In each of these areas a moment of change and transition is indicated, but also a hesitation between moderation, renewal and radicalization of motives. For some postmodernism is the summary of all the destructive forces of our time, for others it is the necessary consequence of modern trends, a sign of the dynamics of our culture. For the pessimists it is a threat, a strange and alien world, the death blow of traditional values, for the optimists it is a moment of new opportunities and for the realists it is the necessary consequence of the modern project.

The purpose of this article is to investigate postmodernism in order to explain its consequences for faith, for the church and for theology. After a brief explanation of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism, we will try to discern clearly their tendencies to observe it as a lifestyle, postmodern existence and as a current and trend in contemporary philosophy and its consequences in historiography and theology. In the end we have to look for the theological explanation of postmodernism.

1. The project of modernity

The thought of the Middle Ages, continued in the new time by all the variants of confessional Christianity, was theocentric. God is the source of all good, he is the Creator of the world and the Lord of history. Norms and values are not explained by man, but by God, and serve his purposes. Man is a dependent being. There is only one true religion.

Modernism is the worldview that denies this theocentrism. In the Middle Ages it manifested itself in certain critical tendencies, during the Renaissance it was established in the form of humanism alongside Christianity and in the time of enlightenment it took over Western culture and all its expressions. At this time Christianity is disqualified as pre-modernism, and therefore, old-fashioned. Modernism is anthropocentric, substituting faith (trust in authorities) for reason, which becomes the last and only authority to explain the world and to define morality.

Modernism was the 'liberation of man from his naivety, of which he himself was guilty (Emmanuel Kant). It believes with unshakable faith in the goodness and creativity of man and entrusts the construction and government of the world to ideological systems (liberalism and socialism) and to the sciences. In other words, he entrusts the sciences with the responsibility of designing the alternatives of the political, economic, educational and moral programme and expects the ideologies to shape these alternatives in a competitive democratic system. Modernism is the name of an ambitious project to reshape the world. It was an imperative project with messianic hopes, totalitarian and militant convictions. Even conservative and reactionary forces were adapting to its way of thinking. In this way modernism was being introduced into Christianity, making (modern) theology an ally of its program.

Extension and crisis of modernity

In the 20th century the modern project spread to all nations. Colonialism and decolonization, Marxism and post-Marxism, nationalism and neo-liberalism pushed them forward on the path of modern progress. Urbanization, industrialization, globalization and Americanization are the effects. For the first time a world is established and this world is founded on the principles of modernism.

There are two paradoxical moments in this process: (1) The contribution of the Christian mission to modernization has been decisive, but it is tragic that it has not produced a Christian world, but the modern and secular world, with all its economic, ideological, technological and militaristic aggressiveness. The present enmity of the Islamic world against the West is an opposition to the project of modernity, but it is significant that Islamic fundamentalism identifies modernism and Christianity. (2) The other tragic moment is that while the project of modernization expanded worldwide, the West itself, where it originated, turned its back on it. It does not replace it with another project, but it cancels out its values by accelerating, radicalising and intensifying the critical and sceptical sense inherent in modernism.

The Leap - 1968

There are different factors why modernism could not retain confidence in its own values. The world wars, the revolutions of the 20th century, decolonization, the Cold War and the total corruption of Marxism showed that the project of modernism was not manageable.

Neo-Marxism showed that in reality the whole project was driven by the social-economic interests of the Western middle and upper classes. The revolution of 1968, charged with the feeling of guilt for the past, turned against the elitist and, therefore, pre-modern structures in the West itself, radicalising and accelerating the ideological forces of modernism to realise - at last - the ideological ideals of liberalism and socialism. When the generation of '68 gained power in all sectors of society, it was clear that its ideological strength had already been exhausted. The changes it was able to make in the political, economic, educational and cultural systems are ambiguous and do not satisfy the illusions of the 1960s. The fall of the Berlin Wall was the ultimate proof that ideologies could not lead the world. At the same time, there were signs that technicalism and industrialization were having catastrophic

consequences for ecology. It turned out that the modern project was a project without direction, and the cultural avant-garde turned away from its illusions.

For a few centuries modernity has challenged and provoked traditional thinking and morality. It was established as modern philosophy, modern science, music, literature, modern theology. In all these areas modernity transgressed the classical rules and by doing so discovered new realities. Postmodernity challenges precisely this dynamic. It provokes it, criticizes it, ironizes it and irritates it by radicalizing it. It does not observe its label and does not respect modernity's inherent caution not to question its own principles.

2. Post-modern existence

The change in aesthetics

In 1946 the philosopher of British history, Arnold Toynbee, used the term postmodernism for the (probably) last phase of European culture, which he started in 1870, but the word has its origin in aesthetics. Already in the 1920s there was a type of poetry in Spain that was called postmodern, and from the 1960s it is the name for the experimental and avant-garde forms of art, literature and architecture. It is original, renovating, controversial art, which provokes by its brutal exhibitionism and by its irony and parody.

The artistic expressions of postmodernism are so diverse that it is not possible to unite them by the characteristics of one style. In architecture it is sometimes a return to traditional principles, but it is almost always hyper-experimental art with experiments that deny all classical and modern definitions. There is a tendency in it to question reality. Then it no longer wants to reflect anything but itself and not want to communicate anything. She makes fun of herself and of moral conventions by publishing books with only white pages, novels with no beginning, no end and no intrigue that are browsed in the library without reading them, theatre that plays only itself, trivial objects that shake with their banality but that claim the title of art. The true beginning of post-modernism is the moment when these experiments no longer scandalize and when they are imitated in moderate forms. Then one has already forgotten about modernism. At this point the changes in aesthetics penetrate fashion, producing the non-fashionable, which prescribes nothing and allows everything, and the anti-fashionable, which breaks with civic norms.

Television is the catalyst par excellence of post-modern aesthetics. Its influence coincides completely with the changes we observe. They are changes caused by the viscosity and superficiality of this medium that at the same time allow its influence. In this article we will not pay explicit attention to the media, but its influence is assumed everywhere. They not only extend the post-modern worldview, but also determine it. They adapt all reality to their requirements and thus create a hyper-real reality in which knowledge becomes information and at the same time fun. Furthermore, the media place themselves in such a way at the centre of this reality that the medium becomes the message.

The change of values

Changes in aesthetics are almost always the signs of a change in values. The forms change, because they no longer correspond to the content. Postmodernism was hyper-experimental and provocative art but it became the word to point out the experimental lifestyle of the last decades of the 20th century.

Postmodernism sacrifices the moral and civic values of the Western world. Humility, dignity, fidelity, prudence, moderation, honesty, responsibility, justice and solidarity have lost their prestige. It seems that the ability to observe these values without accusing them of hypocrisy has also been lost. The systematic violation of them, which postmodernism allows, sometimes has an ironic and relaxed form, sometimes is exhibitionist, brutal, vulgar and provocative. It is always hedonistic and therefore permissive with regard to drugs, inconvenient erotica, ecstatic music, esoteric religions and risky sports. How can something that produces pleasure be bad? A person's dignity is attributed exclusively to his individuality, which is untouchable, but not to his conduct. Everyone has the right to define their own ethics. Postmodernism is anti-authoritarian, but it is not anarchistic. Instead of moral consensus based on a common ethic with fixed rules, it advocates tolerance and moral plurality guaranteed by law, and thus explains the paradoxical combination of relativism and legalism. It demands that state laws give space (tolerance) - increasingly wide - to forms of conduct that were previously reprehensible, but which in post-modernism are called experimental or alternative. However, these laws do not reflect absolute values; they are only arrangements that order coexistence. Postmodern society is necessarily multicultural because it denies the right of any person to demand adaptation to any moral system. Moral and civic education is limited to tolerance training. Postmodern influence systematically changes morality into freedom of experience, precisely where life is most vulnerable and needs most protection: marriage, family, unborn life, education, and the moment of death. Just as in art, where experiments hide true art, social experiments replace values. Where a homosexual relationship is called marriage, there marriage is hidden.

Due to the radical change in values, post-modernism is not only post-Christian but also post-humanist. It no longer shares the optimism of modern-day humanist anthropology and does not want to sacrifice itself to realize its ideals. The bloodiest century in history, which is presented every day in all its filth, cruelty, harshness and lies through television, gives no reason to believe in the goodness and creativity of man, nor in the absolute value and autonomy of the person. However, post-modernism has no alternative and is therefore deeply pessimistic. It doubts the meaning that ideologies have given to life, it doubts its projects and it doubts the benefit of science and technology, even though it enjoys their effects. His relativism and scepticism are ambiguous, selective and eclectic, even cynical and cowardly. He criticizes and relativizes by means of irony and parody, but he does not design a better world.

Postmodernism is moral nihilism, which keeps its forms for aesthetic reasons. Good and bad are etiquette things. It seems that common aesthetic sense is the only criterion for approval or disapproval. The aesthetization of life manifests itself in an existence without meaning, a

dynamic without purpose, a creativity without principles that are illustrated by the lifestyle: marriages without permanence, families without stability, education without moral basis, art and fashion without style, and finally, some qualifications that indicate the following in this article, philosophy without reason, history without past, religion without faith.

Modern man was a pilgrim on the path of progress towards the promised land. Postmodern man is a tourist or a vagabond, yuppie or squatter, who wanders through his Disneyland-like world: a meaningless, yet fun world. More than anything he needs these diversions, because only they give meaning to life and help him forget his anguish, his emptiness and his loneliness.

Not everything is postmodernism

Postmodernism, as we have seen so far, is an ideal guy, a mannequin, dressed in postmodernism. It's a combination of all his general appearances. In the reality of the world we don't find him with this clarity. The suggestive force of the word postmodernity is so great that it absorbs phenomena that are in no way typical for our time. There is much analogy between postmodernism and sophism, Greek cynicism and epicureism, the French skepticism of the 18th century, the decline of the fin de siècle (19th-20th century) and the German decline (1918-1933). These historical phenomena contain several elements that are now called postmodernism.

In a certain sense, postmodernism is the projection of the life position of the cultural avant-garde of the time to the whole of society. The future will tell to what extent this avant-garde has been truly representative. Postmodernism is not the only criticism of modern society. On the right side there are conservative movements that defend Christian and humanist values, on the left side there are movements that maintain the optimism of modernism because of its faith in the moral progress of humanity, for example the New Age movement.

3. Philosophy without reason

The end of metaphysics

The values of modernism, radicalized and annulled by postmodernism, are not Christian but humanistic, based on metaphysics. Metaphysics is the discovery that behind the things observed there is an order, a system of ideas, in which the essence of things is reflected. It is an order that we can deduce without observing it. Next, metaphysics is the desire to know and explain this order and these ideas: being, the conditions which give it meaning: truth, reason, justice, goodness, and beauty, and also general ideas such as god, man, soul, life, animal, flower, and so on. The use of reason in metaphysics is ambiguous: as reason is part of it and as thinking is the instrument to approach it. It is the staircase to climb to the upper room of metaphysics and a piece of furniture in it.

The metaphysics of Emanuel Kant

Emanuel Kant's philosophy is one of the main pillars of modern thought. By means of critical reason, he puts an end to all traditional religious and transcendental ideas because all

knowledge must give an account to the court of reason. However, first of all, reason itself must show its validity, it must come to the knowledge of itself. It turns out, according to Kant, that reason cannot get out of empirical reality and that it subjects all observations to the categories of thinking. The consequence is that all perception reflects thought. Things are adapted to man's thinking. For example, modern man always sees reality in the forms of natural laws, but these are laws invented by his reason. All the changes that we observe reflect causality and we will never observe something that moves without cause, because our way of thinking is causal. Is a metaphysics, a systematic cohesion of all knowledge possible, while reason never enters the empirical world? Yes, because Kant attributes to it the capacity to conclude, to unite empirical knowledge and rational knowledge, and therefore an opinion is produced. Based on the opinions he arrives at universal ideas: soul (subjectivity), world (objectivity) and god (unity and causality). Kant does not define the content of these ideas, but only shows their rational validity, creates space for them. He shows that the limit of reason is at the point where knowledge ends. At this point there is room for faith. He says: 'I must weaken knowledge, to make room for faith'. Faith in God and in immortality are permitted by critical reason, but not demonstrated by it. However, there is another kind of reason, practical reason, which prescribes what is to be done and thus establishes morality. Prescriptions do not have a transcendental origin, but are, like the laws observed by theoretical reason, part of thinking. It turns out that morality is revealed by reason. Faith in God and in immortality necessarily arise from this rational morality, but at the same time they are limited by it, because they can never refer to any supernatural revelation. Religion is the recognition of moral obligations as divine commandments, so that faith and religion will always remain within the limits of practical reason, i.e., morality.

Postmodernism is the acceleration and intensification of skeptical reason which since the time of Kant has dominated modern thought. It deeply doubts the possibility of the reliable reproduction of reality and proposes the deconstruction of all broad systems, whether religious, metaphysical or ideological. That is, through a radical, inventive and creative critique he fragments and displaces the facets of these systems, empties their main concepts and deprives them of their legitimacy. Its scepticism denies the possibility of re-establishing a new systematic coherence of all knowledge. He cannot and does not want to know the meaning of things.

The crisis of reason

The consequence of post-modern scepticism is that reason itself loses its function as a universal criterion of knowledge. It becomes an instrument of thinking with a local-occasional-private use that shares - more than before - its authority with other mental functions such as imagination, creativity and sensitivity. The de-legitimization of reason implies the elimination of metaphysics and all the values of the modern world based on it and then the liquidation of the philosophical and ideological systems. Through the suppression of metaphysics there is no essential being, no absolute and eternal truth, no justice, goodness and beauty, and no general intellectual and moral ideas. Life loses its meaning a priori and becomes a project to which each person must attribute his own end.

Hyperrealism

The elimination of reason also means the liquidation of man as a subject who perceives, knows and gives meaning. The realism of modernism with its rationality and objectivity is replaced by hyperrealism, which, paradoxically, is an extreme nominalism. Hyperrealism is the immediate sensation of direct reality, the intensification of the momentary and the casual that prevents the connection of it with a wider reality with more space and time. At a certain moment he perceives a certain reality but he cannot conclude to what extent this perception is explained by himself or by something external. In this momentary and hypersubjective perception, the essential distinction between subject and object disappears. The subject is dead', says postmodernism, and with it also the possibility of objective and reliable knowledge.

Postmodern man is no longer the self-sufficient person, the bourgeois of the modern era, who claims human rights and knows the meaning of life, but a multiform person. His autonomy is dissolved and fragmented into a multiple existence of many different roles that lack a centre or hierarchy. The only transcendence of post-modern existence consists of momentary and ecstatic experiences.

Postmodern Linguistics

After the deconstruction of the metaphysics, the subject and the object, we will not be surprised that the language is also deconstructed. Paradoxically, it begins with the overestimation of linguistic systems, attributing a hyper-real value to the narrative or the text, as postmodernism prefers to say. It is not any later reflection that reflects the perceived reality, but rather by its structure it precedes it and gives it its form. Reality adapts to language. Language gives reality to reality. It is an autonomous system of signs to which both the author and the readers are subject, which constructs reality by proposing to observe it according to its structures. The one who speaks in the text is neither the author nor the subject, but the language itself which determines the form of the narration. There is no possibility of telling something completely new because language does not allow this. It is not the reader who reads (interprets) the text, but the text itself that makes the reader a reader.

After the overestimation of language and the establishment of a hyperreal reality based on it, post-modern philosophy begins its deconstruction by diminishing its capacity. It denies that it is an adequate instrument to record reliable knowledge of an objective reality. Language replaces it with the one it itself proposes so that the reality we perceive is linguistic, consisting of narratives, texts and language. It is an imperative reality, because it is the only one that exists and at the same time relative, because it consists of many forms and none of them is so definitive that it can claim absolute truth.

Reality is textuality, says postmodernism. Meaning, interpretation, logic, causal relationship and structure have no relationship with objective reality, but only with linguistic reality. The text is not explained by context (something that is not in the text) because there is nothing outside or above the text. Each text is preceded by other texts and with them forms a

network of intertextuality. Communication is intertextuality. The author has the ability to produce a text thanks to other texts and the reader can interpret it, thanks also to other texts. Intertextuality is like a hall of mirrors in which a text reflects nothing but other texts. Words are signs and their meaning is not produced by reference to external things, but by reference to other signs. A culture, a religion, but also history itself are sets of linguistic systems.

4. History without a past

Crisis of history

Postmodernism is a sign that all confidence in history and its favourable fate, so characteristic of modernism, has dried up. Postmodern man is left with nothing but a meaningless and hopeless act. He is a being who lives from day to day to enjoy the moment. The figures in the movies are more familiar to him than his own ancestors. He has detached himself from history but does not experience the break. He is an individualist, without a story and therefore without a social context, without guidance from the past and without hope for the future, looking for instant gratification. Even the daily news becomes loose news that only confirms the meaninglessness of the story.

All things in this world are transient phenomena, says the philosopher of history F.R. Ankersmit, and so it is very likely that history itself is also transient. Therefore: if the end and the end of history are identical, then the end of history is annihilation. This profound nihilism is at the heart of the post-modern occupation with history. If history has no meaning and if the past has no capacity for orientation, then knowledge of history is superfluous. To the extent that the now has yet to be explained by the past, it is understood as the result of all the failures of previous generations that manifest the vanity of their moral and spiritual values. History is no longer an inheritance that one must preserve, but a ruin that we must make inhabitable. This is how the most radical moral changes are legitimated, and the historical conscience is so weak that it no longer offers any conservative protection against them.

In modern times ideologies were legitimised by history and gave meaning to it. The political context of post-modernism is that of the end of ideologies. The dramatic moment of the fall of the Berlin Wall ended their relevance and also the relevance they gave to history. Another aspect of the context that influences the crisis of history in postmodernism is the excessive abundance of historical information precisely in a time that doubts the sense of it. The profusion apparently confirms the meaninglessness because it complicates the clarity of historical judgment instead of favoring it. There is even talk of the end of history, but it turns out that history ends up being irrelevant, which reduces it to the raw material of the cinema.

Historicism and Post-Modernism

The crisis of history that postmodernism points to is also a radicalization and intensification of modern trends. Above all, historicism, the deep historical consciousness of the second half of the 19th century, without a definitive religious or ideological position, attributed to it an almost metaphysical value for its capacity to give meaning to reality through historical explanation. Because of its ideological indecision, historicism was able to ally itself with idealism, positivism, existentialism and militant ideologies, so that we can hardly find it in pure form. Its purest form anticipates the relativistic thinking of postmodernism: it is a historical consciousness that is determined by its method (aestheticism) and that manifested itself as deep skepticism. It has an interest in the past 'for itself', giving it a relevance of its own that diminishes its educational relevance, but at the bottom it has no other interest in history than to know and investigate it. Although he reduces reality to its historical appearance, he does not see it as independent of observation. It is only through the intellectual effort of the observer that it is transformed into a reality with cohesion and meaning. Because of its relativism and subjectivism, historicism favours amoralism, since it explains the norms as irrational products of historical development. In doing so, it relativizes all moral or spiritual values already disconnected from their spiritual roots. Values only interest it to the extent that they have influenced a certain historical constellation. Historical reality explains values and values never determine reality.

Historians themselves feared the consequences of their thoughts. Nevertheless, historicism became the world view of humanism and neo-Protestantism of the 19th century which, perhaps more than the scientific concept of reality, which developed at the same time, has dominated bourgeois thinking in this century.

Despite the evident contrast between the deep historical consciousness of historicism and the disinterest of postmodernism, there is a continuity between the two. The epistemological and moral scepticism and relativism of historicism already contains the same doubts regarding the possibility of obtaining reliable knowledge of the past. Postmodernism radicalizes and intensifies them by denying the reality and objectivity of the past. According to postmodernism, historiography predates history.

Post-modern historiography

Postmodernism reduces all the past and all history to its textual reality, so the world and its history are a linguistic construction. A historical narrative is a (hyper)reality. According to these ideas, the historian constructs history instead of reconstructing and representing it, as modernism intended. In the end, history is nothing more than a literary, fictitious, aesthetic creation, as imaginary as imagination and fiction. The past and history are no longer criteria for defining the quality of narration because the only criterion is aesthetic.

The language speaks, the author is dead and the reader cannot penetrate the reality behind the narration, says postmodernism. The creation of meaning is impersonal and subjective, it does not depend on the author. Each person is his or her own historian.

By eliminating the author, the context is also eliminated so that each fact - if we can still speak of facts - becomes an unexplained atom. All the facts together form a casual whole. According to these ideas the text does not owe its meaning to the author, nor to the historical context, but to itself and to other texts. It does not explain any objective reality, but only itself, and this without any claim to absolute truth.

Rejection of history

Reality is textuality, says postmodernism, historical reality is also textuality. This aesthetization of history degrades people and facts to texts and narratives and renounces truth, causality and chronology in history and also objective judgment. There is a rejection of history itself in postmodern historiography. It is disqualified as macro-history, the product of the cultural dominance of the West that imposes its historical concept on everyone. It is the history of the victors, men, whites, a system that violates the many micro-histories. Postmodernism wants to rid history of this macro-history and its methods and change it into a free, skeptical, creative, ironic historiography without a professional method.

Nihilistic and revolutionary purposes appear in these theses, because if historical reality is only an artistic construction, legitimated by historiography, it can be changed with the same right. By renouncing the capacity to distinguish between truth and lie, truth and myth, post-modern historiography denies the capacity to do historical justice to the victims. It cannot even take their suffering seriously.

5. Religion without faith

We have observed postmodernism as the acceleration and radicalization of modern criticism and skepticism in philosophy and historiography. It is also the acceleration of secularism. However, it is not the end of religion, but appears as the beginning of a new spirituality.

Religion without God; the end of theism

The modern project was to 'do it without God', to establish human control over all things. Modern theology supported this project and allowed man to decide for himself the content of his beliefs on the basis of reason and religious feelings. The climax of modernism was the declaration of the death of God in the 19th century, which was echoed in the secularization theology of the 1950s and 1960s.

Although postmodernism is a radicalization and intensification of modern secularism, it seems that postmodern theology is a moderation of the aggressive and critical humanism of modern theology. It seems more modest and more tolerant, because it is less rationalistic, more respectful of religious traditions and theological concepts. However, in spite of its more moderate criticism, its scepticism is deeper. Modernism tried to free biblical truth from the old

worldview, its myths and its naive historiography, but these issues no longer interest post-modern theology. It is radically anti-authoritarian and anti-doctrinal, not subject to the authority of pre-modern criteria, nor to modern ones. It makes no effort to demythologize the Bible, because its linguistic concepts do not distinguish between myth and history. It allows for the paradox that the biblical story, although it has not happened, is nevertheless true, and this means that all biblical content is myth.

Postmodern Spirituality

The religiosity of postmodernism renounces God and theism, but takes its own spirituality very seriously. It rejects all rationalism and is the transition from a doctrinal faith (pre-modern or modern) to a narrative, poetic and emotional faith. Its typical form is that of essays and workshops in which it deconstructs all the broad schemes of religion and metaphysics. God, as the explanation and final norm of existence, is replaced by an immanent transcendence, consisting of sublime moments. By the elimination of history as an objective reality, the history of salvation is also eliminated. Even the idea of salvation is replaced by the offering of new opportunities. Dogma, doctrine, theology, anthropology, soteriology have no more value than metaphors that can be replaced by new ones, experimental and visionary, by spontaneity and sensitivity. All this without system and without norm. Post-modern believers no longer seek communion based on unanimity regarding the content of faith, but are satisfied with the common act of believing in something.

All this produces a relational, relative and subjective theological truth. The postmodern believer may retain a certain form of theism, however, he does not believe in God but hopes that he exists and reserves for himself the right to give content to this hope according to his preferences. As a consequence, he admits types of theology with limited and particularist use that end its catholicity: liberation theology, feminist theology, ecumenical theology. Each believer can design her own faith, each current her own theology. The subjectivity and the multiplicity of religious truth allow for a new polytheism. For example: feminine and masculine images of God replace the biblical idea of God as Father and the metaphysical idea of the absolute God. The consequence is that the Christian ethic, which was more or less preserved by modernism, is also fragmented. Scripture and theology can no longer have the same moral message for the whole church.

Postmodern spirituality has much in common with New Age spirituality, but the main difference is its pessimism. That is why its spirituality is hope without faith and faith without truth. Faith is no longer the reality of what is expected, but its illusion. It is not based on truth, but on the illusion of truth. This pessimistic spirituality produces types of religion and theology that force themselves to be silent about God, even to erase his name, and in this way we find it in post-modern existence. It distrusts all established religiosity and disqualifies it as hypocrisy. It is satisfied with negative clichés about it and thus creates its own myths.

Religion without object; narrative theology

Postmodern theology has lost its object, which is God, but this does not happen because Christian faith and theology have finally lost the last of their verisimilitude. Postmodern man

renounces God, even the metaphysical concept of God, because he has lost both his faith and his unbelief. Dogmas are no longer dogmas and the cause is not their own inconsistency, but because faith has become

How should the church respond to the challenges of postmodern existence? Should it renounce elements of doctrine and practice that have become a hindrance to the faith of the postmodern generation, absolute truths, rigorous ethics?

The questions point to the danger of sacrificing essential elements to the spirit of the times and a 'church that marries into this spirit will soon be a widow', as the Dutch theologian Hendrik Berkhof has already said.

6. The theological meaning of postmodernism

The Christian must discern the signs of the time (Matt. 16:3). There are times of refreshment and other more difficult times when Christians suffer from spiritual suffocation and the work of evangelization seems impossible (Acts 3:16; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:13; 4:3; 2 Peter 3:3; Jude 1:18). There are times of grace and times of judgment. How are we to evaluate postmodernism, as a time of refreshment, a time of judgment, or just a time like any other, an appearance of this world that will pass away (1 Cor. 7:31)?

The first part of the 20th century, the time of Miguel de Unamuno and José Ortega y Gasset, was characterized by a deep, almost prophetic, sensitivity to the critical conditions of Western culture and the Christian church. There was a general awareness of the crisis of culture due to moral and spiritual nihilism and an equal awareness of responsibility. Three voices from the middle of the 20th century who observed phenomena now called postmodernism can illustrate this spirit: The philosopher of Dutch history, Johan Huizinga (died 1944), concerned with the nihilistic denial of metaphysical values (reason, meaning, truth, justice) said: A culture must have a metaphysical orientation, or it cannot exist. Is postmodernism the end of Western culture? In 1944 Dietrich Bonhoeffer (died 1945) in his letters from prison observes a world without religion. The metaphysical religiosity of modern times, after replacing faith in the living God, had become implausible to itself. Bonhoeffer seeks a faith in God without contamination by metaphysics and asks himself: Can we talk about God without religion, that is without the metaphysical and psychological assumptions characteristic of the time? Is religion (religiosity) really a condition of salvation? In 1945, Helmut Thielicke, a German Lutheran theologian, noted that modernism had produced a type of person who was insensitive to questions of truth, meaning and salvation. A type of person without support, with only a position. According to Thielicke, moral and spiritual nihilism is the effect of the hardening judgment because of God's intentional exclusion from the modern world. That is why he does not treat it as a merely cultural and philosophical phenomenon, but as a pastoral problem, despite its general extension.

Cautious conclusions

It is obvious that a radical separation of Christian faith and metaphysics is not possible. There is no salvation through faith in Christ that does not at the same time explain existence and satisfy man's deepest desires. Postmodernism states that Christianity without religion, which Bonhoeffer sought, cannot exist. It only produces spirituality without faith, without reason, without criterion and in the end without content. A spirituality that at the same time is cynical for its disqualification of all values, frivolous for its experimentalism and hedonistic for turning religion into one more diversion. To respond to post-modernism we must maintain the humanism of the Word of God that recognizes man's misery, his need for salvation and his deepest aspirations. This recognition is more than an assumption or a coincidence. It is active and effective, because it precedes and anticipates the deepest aspirations, precisely because it awakens them. For example, the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount awaken the thirst for justice, purity and peace, the need for salvation and mercy, the desire to know God and then respond to these aspirations.

The new spirituality of postmodernism is by no means repentance in the New Testament sense of changing one's mind for the sake of God's word, but rather hardening. That is why postmodernism is not the end of modernism's unbelief, but its intensification and radicalization. Hardening is the moment in which unbelieving arguments are apparently confirmed by the reality of the world. In Scripture it is always a moment of judgment in which the cause and consequences of evil coincide (Ps. 81:12; Is. 6:10-11; Rev. 22:11).

Is there a future after postmodernism; is there a possibility of liberation from it? The general idea of salvation in Scripture is not one of deliverance from judgment, but of salvation through judgment. For our generation it means that there is no turning back from postmodernism. The church has to go through the test of it, has to suffer its temptations and also the political and social consequences of its amorality. It is surprising and disturbing that most current Christian observations of postmodernism are either neutral or predominantly positive. They value it as a neutral historical phenomenon, even hoping that postmodern spirituality is a new opportunity for the preaching of the gospel. How can they positively evaluate a cultural current that is catastrophic for the morality of our world and paralyzes the church, a spirituality that not only substitutes for the content of faith, but also for faith itself? It seems that these observations lack the prophetic sense that was common among the most sensitive Christians and humanists in the first part of the 20th century.

Postmodernism manifests the impossibility of founding faith on some kind of subjectivity, be it religious feelings or spiritual experiences. It must have a more solid base. Hebr. 11.1 helps us by saying that faith is the reality of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. The things a Christian expects are the same as the invisible things. They are the things of God, even God Himself. Thus we understand that faith is the reality and the evidence of God.

Postmodernism for the church is not a cultural issue, but a pastoral one. It is a question of preaching the gospel to the world in which the function of faith and trust has ceased. More than ever, because of the special conditions of the cultural situation, we have to concentrate on the center of the gospel itself which is Jesus Christ. We must not doubt the efficacy of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16) and, above all, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebr. 13:8). The gospel still calls for repentance and does so by awakening and appealing to man's deepest aspirations. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled (Matt.5.6).

Postmodernism reduces the truth of Scripture to a narrative, but perhaps this same narrative, the relevant narrative of the story of Jesus Christ and of the life of Old and New Testament believers is the most appropriate form of biblical preaching in the postmodern world. In this world the gospel is no longer confirmed by concepts, values and norms of a culture that it has established itself. That is why it no longer makes sense to appeal to them. As in the ancient church and in all missionary situations, the preaching of the gospel in the postmodern world has to create its own space, a space of language, of understanding and of experience, a space where Christ is truth and reality and where faith is possible. This happens in narrative preaching.

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