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The Transformation of the Self in a Secular Culture. A Discussion on Pannenberg's Position

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The Transformation of the Self in a Secular Culture. A Discussion on Pannenberg's Position

Cecilia Echeverría Falla

Abstract- The topic under consideration is the change in the human self understanding in the secular culture, according to Pannenberg, a contemporary thinker of great rational strength. The author poses some questions which underline the ambiguities of secularization and its historical causes. The result has been a new model of man According to Pannenberg, the impact of the (17th- 18th centuries) Modern ideas over the concept of the self has been great. The author highlights the fact that some of Pannenberg´s arguments are contradictory, because his logic about God does not go beyond the rational sphere, for him the problem of atheism and secularization lies in God inaccessibility, not in man´s will.

Even if man thinks that religion belongs to an outpaced age, when he is placed in front of the sacred, he feels surpassed and overwhelmed. He looks for that being that God wanted to be his image. Man does not stop being a task for himself. Only by rising to the religious subject is when freedom gets its true meaning, ethics reaches its pure content, and interpersonal relationships become stronger.

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I. Introduction

Nowadays in the western world, we live in a culture in which we can confirm a range of totally unprecedented dynamics that interweave a singular context with different threads. On the one hand, we face a scenario of a globalized society which has been shaped by the immediacy of information streaming of new media resulting from the "technological revolution". On the other hand, in contemporary culture we live in a context called "post-modernity", which at the same time has assumed essential elements of what has been called the "Modernity Project", but also implies a dialectical attitude toward this project. It assumes the essence of the spirit of modernity -emancipation-, but at the same time, it is critical towards it.

The time frame of this reflection is offered by the historical process of secularization, which begins with the Protestant Reformation, whose fifth centennial we commemorated lately. The topic under consideration is the transformation suffered by the image of man and his relationship with God in postmodern age which begun with the religious division caused by the Reformation. To avoid the risk of reducing post modernity exclusively to the process of emancipation of the individual towards the promotion and preservation of freedom, or to the claim of the person's complete autonomy, I have chosen the stance of Wolfhart Pannenberg[1], a contemporary thinker of great theoretical and rational strength, whose thought is a interdisciplinarity display. Wolfhart Pannenberg, talks, from the podium of theology and philosophy with the main philosophical, historical, theological, anthropological and scientific movements of our time. Pannenberg integrates all fields of humanistic knowledge. One of the greatest XX century authors that along with other Lutheran theologians of his generation such as von Rad, Tillich, Bultmann, Barth, Moltmann, etc., devoted himself to the task of rationally substantiating the Christian faith, and speaking responsibly of God and man.

Among the many praises written in memory of the great Pannenberg after his death on September 4, 2014, just six years ago, draws attention to the conclusion of Carl E. Braaten's editorial in the International Journal of Systematic Theology: "Pannenberg was the most complete theologian I have ever read or known, decidedly more than even Karl Barth or Paul Tillich. When one examines the bibliography of Pannenberg's works and all the books, articles and reviews written about his thought, one would be hard put to identify a single topic or question of theological interest that he did not address, and always in a manner showing that he had read everything important published on the subject. He published three large volumes of Systematic Theology, and equally huge volumes on Anthropology in Theological Perspective, Christology, Theology and the Philosophy of Science, two volumes of Basic Questions in Theology, and shorter monographs on ethics and spirituality. The passing of Wolfhart Pannenberg marks the end of an era, two centuries of unquestionable German superiority

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[1] Wolfhart Pannenberg was born in Stettin (back then Germany; today, Poland) on September 2,1928. At the beginning of his career he followed Karl Barth steps, his teacher. In 1956 he took up the Chair of Systematic Theology at the Evangelical Faculty at Munich University until 1994. He was an outstanding spokesman of contemporary ecumenical dialogue. His apology for Christianity is based on coherence and rational argumentation. Pannenberg is the Protestant theologian who has studied the Catholic doctrine and theology with more intensity. Since he published *Revelation as History* in 1961 he developed a monumental theological project from different perspectives.

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in the production of systematic theologies that started with Schleiermacher's Glaubenslehre[2]."

One of his most important concerns was the phenomenon of progressive privatization of religion called "secularization", and contemporary atheism, which was a growing and apparently unidirectional phenomena that has come to modify the vision of man and cultural awareness inspired by Christianity.

To begin with, I will review the ambiguities that surround the concept of secularization which have given rise to a wide range of evaluations. Religious life segmentation has been a silent and progressive process, that has brought to light the question of the existence of God as a questionable issue, since there are those who do not recognize it, nor accept his existence. Here it is suggested that Pannenberg incurs some paradoxes, because he takes for granted that the problem lies in God and in his inaccessibility, and not in man's will. Today, just as in other times, the veil of God's inaccessibility is not completely uncovered, its silences continue to defy man, but that does not eliminate the human effort to listen him and open ourselves to reality.

In the next section I will study the historical causes which gave rise to the secularization process. According to Pannenberg, there is a cause-effect connection between the Protestant Reformation and the rise of the secular phenomenon. In this point, he disagrees with other authors, which also come from the Lutheran school of thought. Secularization brought with it a series of anthropological and social changes, whose contents are implicit in the postmodern perspective and have gone diametrically away from the biblical portrait of man as the image of God. At present it is often said that religions and religious feelings belong to an outpaced stage of human development. We will try to show that the religious meaning is something constitutive of human essence, not a stage of civilization or a philosophical movement. This argument leads to a theme studied deeply by Pannenberg– that of man as the image of God, which contrasts with the modern understanding of the autonomous self. The theme is, as I think, clearly very rich and, therefore, susceptible to extensive treatment, which here, as is logical, has no place.

The concluding section proposes to overcome the jumbled and multiple comprehension of the postmodern self by an approach that emphasizes in man the openness to God's gift as the essence of freedom.

II. Ambiguities of the Secularization Process

When addressing this issue, it is necessary to ask some questions that highlight the core of the problem I wish to address: the ambiguities of the secular process and its relation to the spirit of modernity. Is the Christian heritage still present as a fundamental element in the life of western post-modernity? Is Christianity found in secular society as a "hidden city" or rather as a factor that makes modern life possible? As post-modern men and women, can we still be Christians without suffering from double personality? Did modernity break up with Christianity?

Undoubtedly, secularization is a peculiar phenomenon of post-modernism, which according to the founders of sociology (Weber[3], Berger[4], and Durkheim[5]) goes hand in hand with modernity in a unidirectional and irreversible process. Pannenberg disagrees with this thinking, and although it is true that secularization is a product of the modernity project, he does not consider them as equivalent processes.

Secularization can be interpreted, on the one hand, as a world where the sacred has disappeared, but it can also refer to a world that continues to be linked to its Christian roots despite its emancipation from Christianity. It is an ambivalent, ambiguous concept that is not unidirectional or irreversible because post-modernity coexists with a religiosity that still persists. Pannenberg realizes that in our contemporary world there are certain values, ideas, attitudes of the Christian religious sphere that constitute a source of meaning and essential actions for a human society. Values and ideas that give meaning to existence, but that take place more in the shadows than in full light, with moments of darkness, and even complete darkness, because the segregation of religious life has been a silent and progressive process in which the sense of God's inaccessibility has become increasingly intense.

The problem of God is a controversial issue, sometimes difficult to open space within the post-modern individual. Pannenberg insists that God is a controversial fact for men because there is no historical evidence. In other words, the controversial cause of God's existence is in God himself, because as lord and creator of everything, he unveils himself gradually throughout history. Pannenberg's claim states that every event in this world is referred to God, also that of his denial or rejection. In this way, he is providing a rational

[2] Carl E. BRAATEN, Editorial: An Encomium: A tribute to Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928-2014), "International Journal of Systematic Theology", vol.17, n.1, (2015), 5.

[3] Cfr. Max WEBER, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* Cambridge UP, London 1977.

[4] Cfr. Peter BERGER, *Secolarizzazione, la falsa profezia,* "Vita e Pensiero" (5-2008), pp. 15-23.

[5] Cfr. Emil DURKHEIM, *Las reglas del método sociológico,* Alianza Editorial, Madrid1974.[Rules of sociological method]

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justification for God's rejection and for secularization, elevating them to principles and taking them for granted.

Pannenberg insists that the reality of God is at stake in history, and only in the final fulfillment will it be clear to all[6]. Obviously, the purpose of this statement is to seek a theological justification for the fact of secularization, of atheism, of the increasing disappearance of God in contemporary society[7]. At the same time, Pannenberg affirms that man is a constitutively religious being and that by opening to the infinite, -the eccentric self-transcendence he calls it-, man has a certain innate idea of God.

Then, how it is possible that some human beings cannot recognize him? Why it is that many of them do not accept him? At present, there is a kind of hearing defect regarding to God's existence. What is said about Him no longer seems adequate to our mind, it even seems pre-scientific. What Pannenberg fails to see is that this hearing defect does not depend only on human intelligence, that the verbs "recognize", "accept" do not belong to the rational discernment but to the will. The paradox of Pannenberg is that by overvaluing knowledge nullifies in man the action of the will. The notion of truth is the definitive criterion that challenges reason, rational evidence, but ignores that the hearing defect, or even the deafness with respect to God, has moral causes that affect the decisive perception.

Some authors have noticed a certain rationalism here, not without reason. For instance, Stanley Grenz[8] states that Pannenberg approaches the faith-reason relationship in a rationalistic way, without taking into account that God's revelation is in mutual relation with the freedom that we have for being his image. "Several conservative critics have found aspects of his rationalist approach problematic for the relation between faith and reason. For them Pannenberg has failed to see that the human problem of spiritual blindness goes deeper than merely a lack of historical evidence. Rather, there is in humans a moral bias toward evil that interferes with the rational process and makes the task of reading revelation in history difficult[9]. Thus, he has been accused of holding a deficient view of the fall, which fails to take seriously its noetic effect[10]–spiritual blindness[11]". God's revelation remains partially hidden and allows us the freedom to open ourselves to Him or to remain closed in our self-sufficiency. God does not impose himself.

Now let us go to the last question–Did Modernity break up with Christianity? If it was so, where was the cause of that break up?

In the process of secularization, two dynamisms stand out, one positive and the other negative.

On the one hand, the amazing scientific and technological development, as well as modern world industrialization have gone hand in hand with the establishment of a secular nature of the State and the public policies. Overcoming the medieval model of Church-State alliance meant the conquest of very valuable achievements, which nobody would like to lose, such as the claim of person's dignity and freedom regardless of their social or cultural position; the recognition of humankind rights; democratic participation in the fate of society, tolerance, the discovery of a more intense form of interiority, and cultural pluralism[12]. Nobody would like to return to the State sponsored religion or to the confusion between the secular and the religious of the pre-modern era, apart from the fact that such a return would no longer be possible.

The negative dynamic consists in the conformation of a secular society model that excludes religion from the political, educational, cultural and labor spheres, due to the propagation of the conviction that Christianity has been the enemy of progress, and that the achievements have been possible because man's creativity has replaced God's position in the act of creation[13]. The peculiarity of a secular sphere in a Christian cultural context no longer exists, as it did in the Renaissance and its posterity; now we have a society characterized by the re-foundation of a universal human culture that leaves God aside.

In his critique of Blumenberg's *Die Legimitat der Neuzei*[14] in 1966[15], Pannenberg gives a new relevance to the category of secularization and he links it with the Protestant Reformation. For him it is not a controversial phenomenon, as it is for Blumenberg, but an ambiguous phenomenon that is in consonance with Modernity but does not follow its same destiny. During the

[6] Cfr. Cfr. Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Teología sistemática* I,UPCO, Madrid 1992, p. 113.

[7] Cfr. Santiago SANZ, *El futuro creador del Dios Trinitario. Un estudio de la Teología Sistemática de Wolfhart Pannenberg,* Edicep, Valencia 2007, p. 171.

[8] Stanley GRENZ, "The Appraisal of Pannenberg: a Survey of the Literature" in C. E. BRAATE, Ph. CLAYTON (eds), *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Twelve American Critiques, with an Autobiographical Essay and Response,* Augsburg, Minneapolis (MN) 1988, p. 23.

[9] Robert ROSS, "Historical Knowledge as a Basis for Faith", Zygon 13 (Spring 1978), 209-224.

[10] Fred H. KLOOSTER, "Aspects of Historical Method in Pannenberg's Theology" in Septuagesimo Anno: G. C. Berkouwer, ed. J. T. Bakker et al., (Kampen, 1973), p. 126.

[11] David P. SCAER, "Theology of Hope, Tensions in Contemporary Theology", ed. Stanley Gundry, Chicago, Moody 1976.

[12] Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Christianity in a Secularized World,* SCM Press Ltd, London 1988, p. 39.

[13] Karl LOWITH, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History,* Fortress Press, Chicago1953, p. 199.

[15] Hans BLUMEMBERG, *The Legitimacy of Modernity,* Verlag O. Lombeck, Frankfurt 1966.

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Reformation, the secularization of the Church's goods and the secularization of the clergy took place. In continuity with the principles of the Reformation there was a secularization in a broader sense understood as the suspension of the privileges of the clergy in favor of the laity. From this point of view, secularization would be the coming of age of lay Christians, who were considered as a lower class within the ranks of the Church. This highlights a feature of Modernity–emancipation, whose tendency was to combat all kinds of authority, both religious and political.

It was a process, rather, of "de-clericalization" or secular ascesis within the world, where the role of the laity became relevant. Luther deprived the profane works (the ordinary work of the ordinary layperson) of the religious sense they initially had, thus ending up favoring secularization, as Brad Gregory has shown in his work "*The Unintended Reformation*"[16]. With the words of a Protestant preacher Sebastian Frank "the real meaning of the Reformation is that all men have become monks", in the sense that having eliminated the ecclesial mediation of the priests, the rejection of monasticism reaffirmed the secular life as a privileged status in God's design. Eliminated the distinction between the sacred and the profane, the road to secularization was drawn.

III. Historical Causes of Secularization Process

The origin of the secularized order of society and the secularization of public culture goes back to the late seventeenth century in what we call the Modernity Project. It represents an important shift in the development of the European culture. It is not that the modern thinkers were rebellious towards the Christian idea of God; moreover, they were very interested in connecting the proof of God's existence with the new scientific and rational way of seeing the world. Pannenberg thinks that the historical roots of the birth of modernity should be sought in other sources. The religious fragmentation that caused the Reformation in Christianity and the religious wars that were unleashed created such unease at European level, that the religious foundations of Europe and, with it, its metaphysical foundations, began to be questioned. The different religious authorities began to lose credibility and a boredom spread in society that led to seek another common authority, which was not religious. Pannenberg thinks, against Blumemberg's[17] opinion, that the next step was to make explicit the dissatisfaction, labeling the Middle Ages, in an unfair and comprehensive way, as the "Dark Ages". The last step was to put Christianity on trial.

According to Barth and Blumenberg, this break of epochs was determined by human emancipation with God. They think that Modern age emerged from an act of self-affirmation against theological absolutism[18]. For Blumenberg, the emancipation phenomenon of the enlightened reason was a reaction to the theological absolutism of the pre-modern era against faith and tradition. Man affirmed his self-sufficiency in front of the transcendent instance and concentrated on himself as a self-referential and individualistic self.

It was the Protestant Reformation that caused the loss of social peace. Christendom, already fragmented in various religious denominations, could do little to recover credibility. The bloody repression of the religious division marked a deep rift in the course of European history. Outbreaks of religious intolerance caused the death of thousands of people. "The flames desolated Europe and the blood of many millions bathed her," wrote John Locke[19].

The need to live together in a multi-confessional Europe led to the conviction that one had to retreat to a neutral ground and look for another basis of unity that offered a secure foundation apart from religion. Without the confidence that there is a God who sustains the moral order of the world, man began to search for a common ground that could offer a reliable foundation different from religion[20]. In the XVII century this common basis was the natural law; afterwards came the establishment of human rights in the 18th and 19th centuries[21].Until that moment tolerance was applied to quench the ardor of the different Christian confessions, but in the s. XIX two new phenomena appeared: the renaissance of militant and fundamentalist Islam and its attempt to spread in the West, and the phenomenon of atheism. With atheism, religion ceases to be a constitutive element of social configuration. Little by little, religion loses relevance in the existence of the individual and becomes a matter of private preference, such as art or literature.

The constitutive role of morality in the secular consciousness was still valid during the XIX century. The idea that this core morality was binding upon all human beings was intelligible because the notion of God was a strong source for this moral legislation. Nobody doubted that moral norms were obligatory because they were part of human nature, until the arrival of Nietzsche who, together with Psychoanalysis, started the demolition of

[16] Cfr. Brad S. GREGORY, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2012.

[17] Hans BLUMEMBERG, *The Legitimacy of Modernity,* Verlag O. Lombeck, Frankfurt 1966.

[18] Cfr. Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Christianity in a Secularized World,* SCM Press Ltd, London 1988, p. 10.

[19] John LOCKE, *Two Tracks on Government,* ed. P. Abrams, Cambridge 1967, p. 160.

[20] Cfr. Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Problemgeschichte der neuen evangelischen Theologie in Deutschland. Von Schleiermacher bis zu Barth un Tillich,* Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Gottingen 1977, pp. 24.

[21] Wolfhart PANNENBERG. *Christianity in a Secularized World,* cit., p.39.

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traditional morality. Nietzsche's criticism impact was so deep that moral rules seemed to be external impositions alien to human nature. They were mere values that society had invented, had inculcated in individuals and, therefore, could be extinguished and changed.

The disappearance of a teleological concept that could justify and order various moral rules has led to rationally interminable moral disputes. Without a shared view of our ultimate purpose we often cannot agree about how to decide between rival claims[22]. Without such a foundation, moral beliefs lack any plausible claim to objectivity, and morality becomes the site of rationally unstable conflicts. The vacant place of religion has been replaced in the 20th and beginnings of the 21th century by "human rights", declared solemnly by the United Nations and assumed in the West like an unappealable common instance. Unlike the rights of the XVIII and XIX century, they are *empty* rights, without any support in human nature nor claim to objectivity, in which there is no disagreement for not considering them moral rules; they are invested with a quasi-religious invulnerability[23].

The confluence of these cultural phenomena left the human being deprived of ethical criteria and significant references to confront the ups and downs of his own life and the challenges imposed by industrialization of modern society. The amazing industrial development of the XX century, which coincided with the expansion of secular culture, led some European thinkers such as Blumemberg[24], Berger[25] and Weber[26] believe that the modern development ran along with the secular process; furthermore, made them believe that they are two roads that require one another. "Since Enlightenment –Berger points out– intellectuals of all orientations have considered that the decline of religion is an inevitable consequence of modernity[27].

IV. Anthropological Contents of Human Religiosity in the Secular Postmodern Culture

At present it is often said that religions and religious feelings belong to an outpaced stage of human development. Certainly, many elements of ancient religions have been lost, likewise medical practice of Hippocrates time. Religion and religious piety have lost their meaning, because its symbols are considered a convention without any ontological meaning. However, those who talk of the end of religion in general indicate a high degree of prejudices and lay themselves open to the suspicion that they have lost sight of the central mystery of human life.

It is true that the religious meaning of natural and social phenomena that once recalled God's presence in the world has changed. However, the religious meaning that determines the significance of being and life, as well as of history and social changes has not changed. It has been a human feature since the origins of man, as well as, for example, his ability to create tools and use fire. Religion offers man a definite instance with which to guide his life. Ignoring this phenomenon or treating it as a minor issue represents a serious philosophical prejudice. No serious attempt to illustrate one of the most defining human traits can exclude or set aside religious experience.

Religion provides man the guide for his life and a meaningful horizon, without which, man would be avid of eternity and perfection, but always frustrated. The experience of human frailty with its diseases and limitations speaks of a man harmed by the wound of time, who struggles to make his way to eternity. It does not make sense to affirm, as Feuerbach did, that man makes his gods rich and perfect at the expense of the idea that he has of himself, as a self-alienation. Nietzsche referred to Feuerbach's point of view, but he went further: "man has diminished and humiliated himself, because he has not dared to assume the powerful and remarkable qualities that he sees in God. Man considered that all his strength is superhuman and strange to himself[28]." Man belittled himself. This is not the case, says Pannenberg, because it is only in the light of divine power that man discovers the richness of his own destiny[29].

Only the religious experience can attest to the depths of the human person and make him discover his interiority, enriching it in an incomparably deeper way than is possible in other areas of the human spirit. Human religiousness dives in man's inner life, it helps him discover his last comprehension, his radical orientation and his complete fulfillment. Man has reflected in its gods the perfections and powers that he wishes to fulfill. Anthropomorphic images of divine express this. When man places himself in front of the sacred, he feels surpassed and overwhelmed. Such a

[22] This significant situation is pointed out also by Charles LARMORE, Patterns of Moral Complexity, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987, p. 24. See also – Cecilia ECHEVERRÍA FALLA, *The Structure of Practical Reason according to Ch. Larmore,* Università della Santa Croce, Rome 1997, p. 89.

[23] Cfr. Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Christianity in a Secularized World,* cit., p. 17.

[24] Hans BLUMEMBERG, *The Legitimacy of Modernity,* Verlag O. Lombeck, Frankfurt 1966.

[25] Peter & Brigitte BERGER, *The Homeless Mind, Modernization and Consciousness,* Harper, New York 1973.

[26] Max WEBER, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* Cambridge UP, London 1977.

[27] Peter BERGER, *Secolarizzazione, la falsa profezia,* "Vita e Pensiero" (5-2008), pp. 15-23,

[28] Cfr. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Más allá del bien y el mal,* Alianza Editorial, Madrid 2012.

[29] Cfr. Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Faith and reality,* The Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1977, p. 40-41.

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mode of representation by no means presupposes a primitive, uncultivated mind, a symbol of an immature conscience, as some contemporary atheists have declared such as Feuerbach or Nietzsche[30]. On the contrary, it indicates a high degree of discernment and culture for men to perceive a face of a human kind in the depth of the manifestations of divine powers. The mysterious divine power which decides the success or failure of a human life lies in a supernatural basis. The supernatural implies a modality to which man aspires, which he would never have suspected and in which man knows himself in a natural order sustained by the gratuitous love of God, both in terms of his origin, and in the attainment of his end[31].

This solidarity cannot be understood if God's experience is reduced to a mystification of the human conscience or to a subjective projection of the need of security and self-pity. Man, only meets and understands himself when he looks in that mirror in which God has wanted to reflect. To be God's image is man's greatness, and any divine icon and anthropomorphous symbol reflects that essence.

If we look in the modern language for a translation of the phrase "image of God", we would probably not find any better than the Greco-Latin concept of "person". This coincidence may seem amazing, considering that there is no trace in the Bible of the notion of "person", not even a semantic equivalent. It was in the context of the Christological and Trinitarian discussions of the first centuries when Christianity was obliged to specify through philosophical-theological categories the two main mysteries of the Christian faith: Jesus Christ and the Trinity, using a concept that delineated the peculiar, distinctive and singular of each being.

Christ is a single person because he has one identity, while in God it is possible to distinguish three persons because each of them has its own features and personality[32]. The culmination of this long and complicated process of elaboration of the philosophical concept occurred in the VI century, when the Roman Boethius, minister of the Ostrogothic king Theodoric, formulates his famous definition of person (*natura rationalis individua substantia*[33]), associating substantiality with rationality. Reason or participation in the logos is what distinguishes man from animals, and logos is a spark of divinity, it is the attribute *par excellence* of the gods[34]. In conclusion, both traditions present a steady framework that emphasizes the dignity of the human person.

V. Enhancement of the Autonomous Self Through the Dynamic Concept of God's Image

While in the classical tradition, the dignity of the human being is based on being the image of God and being a person, for post-modernism, dignity is expressed in autonomy as the supreme act of freedom. In the post-modern scheme the only center of gravity of the "self" is its own subjectivity. Only an "autonomous self" is capable of claiming the freedom and self-sufficiency of which it has been deprived in a theocentric perspective.

The understanding of subjectivity as autonomy affects the way of understanding reason and freedom, and the approach of society. The autonomous self considers itself as the total origin of its acts, the exclusive source of its action guidelines and its fullness is found through its own self-referential unfolding through history[35]. The crisis of the self-referential self, seen as an autonomous and emancipated individual, has led to a situation of cultural pessimism that abandons all pretensions of absolute, to settle for provisional answers (*il pensiero debole*)[36].

God's removal from the human horizon and the cut off of any religious link with culture, at first brought freedom and introduced a phase of cultural flourishing. However, this flowering of the XVIII and XIX centuries, was fueled both by the ancient and the Judeo-Christian perspective, which has shaped so much of modern culture and was the reason of its existence. In the post-modern secular society, the presence of these elements has vanished from culture. This lack of essential understanding of life has intensified the feeling of uprooting and of social anonymity, running the risk of configuring a new religiosity based on the emotional inclinations of the irrational world, regardless of the truth.

At the same time, man has let himself slide down the slope of relativism, of fragmentation, of the meaninglessness of life. The important thing now is the carpe diem! enjoy the moment. Life is a journey that we have to live with intensity no matter where you go. This fragmentary journey leads to a life full of contradictions, languid, where there are no definitive commitments, no lasting engagements, no long-lasting efforts.

[30] Cfr. Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Tipos de ateísmo y su significación teológica,* en *Cuestiones fundamentales de teología sistemática,* Sígueme, Salamanca 1976, pp. 151-166.

[31] Cfr. Luis ROMERA, Finitud y trascendencia. La existencia ante la religión humana, "Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico", Departamento de Filosofía, Universidad de Navarra, 2004, n. 167.

[32] Cfr. Juan Manuel BURGOS, *Antropología: una guía para la existencia,* Palabra, Madrid 2003, p. 29.

[33] BOECIO, *Liber de persona et duabus naturis contra Eutychen et Nestorium,* PL 64, 1343 D.

[34] Cfr. Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Faith and reality,* The Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1977, p. 44.

[35] Cfr. Luis ROMERA, *Finitud y trascendencia. La existencia ante la religión humana,* "Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico", Departamento de Filosofía, Universidad de Navarra, 2004, n. 167.

[36] Cfr. Aa. Vv. *Il pensiero debole* (a cura de G. VATTIMO e P.A. ROVATTI), Feltrinelli, Milán 1983.

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Post-modern consciousness of the finitude is very strong, and the diversity of proposals of his own identity is a mosaic whose color palette varies from intense and dark colors to pale and degraded colors. On the one hand, we have the autonomous individual condemned to fragmentation and to the emptiness of the meaning of his existence, while on the other, there are proposals for an understanding of man from the interpersonal relationship and openness to the gift of the other. In some way, the latter offers some indications to face the understanding of his true identity in the third millennium.

In this sense, Nietzsche's denunciation is valid— we are or we are not. We change the civilization and transmute the values giving light to what we really want, or we live seriously the values of the West, but the languid hypocrisy is not valid. Nietzsche has unmasked us because the most comfortable and easy posture is to throw oneself at the irrational, create emotive substitutes of a sacred or spiritual type, depending on the subjective inclinations. But, where is that being in which God has wanted to reflect? Where is the being whose dignity lies in having been created in the image of God?

The post-modern approach of man as autonomy must be enhanced by an approach that emphasizes openness to God's gift as the essence of freedom. Great has been the gift with which man has been called into existence. God has blown his breath of life into man making him in his own image, but that image is not exhausted by the fact of having autonomy, nor in that of being able to distinguish and affirm one's self in front of others. Nor does someone stop being a person when its self-consciousness has not yet manifested or will never manifest. It is not self-consciousness or reason, nor autonomy that establishes personality, but the iconic relationship with God open to an eternal destiny.

Therefore, the absolute value of the person must be taken seriously and not be assessed only for what he or she contributes to society. In our socio-cultural context, what makes someone valuable? Is not it true that is the success that he is capable of achieving and the opinion that others have of him? People tend to appreciate the curriculum of achievements, their successes or failures, as if the world were a company of personnel selection. This pressure to succeed is stronger now than in other times because of forgetfulness and absence of God. Society's attention is more focused on what one does or is able to do, and on what one possesses, than on what one *is.* This measure of appraising is alienating and dehumanizing, especially in the current scenario where unemployment overshadows the lives of many people and families. The scope of the person is given by the value that is in it: the divine image, and whoever ignores it is unaware of the most radical truth of man.

Opposite to the uncertainty caused by overvaluation of success in the present world, we have to discover the real freedom coming from opening to God's gift. Post-modern human beings would have greater confidence if they knew that God loves them for free. They would not need to justify their worth in front of others according to their benefits and work. Furthermore, they would not be afraid of being set apart or abandoned. God's love is definitive and that gives great freedom.

However, because it is historical, man is not complete as God's image since its origin but has a history to develop to achieve his destiny. Pannenberg proposes to overcome the closed concept of divine image, for an image of God in process. What is natural and specific to the historical human being is its own project to be carried out, a *telos*; but the fact that the end transcends him implies that he cannot limit himself to being a "copy" of the original, but that he must radiate the splendor of the image- model (Jesus Christ).In order to carry it out, it is endowed with the capacity for alterity, response, transcendence, freedom and love. God does not want only what the person "already is", but he calls it to a complete realization of his being. Man does not stop being a task for himself. The unfolding of the divine image in man has not reached its full meaning until he discovers the divine project, the task he has been given.

Man has received a gift with the being *imago Dei*, which gives him an inestimable value; there must already be a "disposition" in him for the development of that gift[37]. The intrinsic relationship between the image of God and its *telos* allows to conceive the human person not only as God's creature, which would be already a lot, but as a being whose only explanation consists in being- for-God (*esse ad Deum*)[38].

The idea of the autonomous self comes into crisis when it is not linked to any concept of reason but is connected to a full and unlimited understanding of the egocentric self, whose limits lie only in the demands of social life. Only by rising to the religious subject is when freedom gets its full meaning, ethics reaches its pure content, and interpersonal relationships become stronger.

"In history, God and man are always manifested together, but man is so in the light of his experience of God. And where feeling for the divine mystery disappears, a distortion or at least a trivialization of the idea of man is to be expected. Consequently, the religious theme cannot simply be brushed aside when man is in question"[39].

[37] Cfr. Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Teología sistemática* II, UPCO, Madrid1996, p. 245.

[38] To delve into this topic, you can consult the article of Cecilia ECHEVERRÍA FALLA, *La imagen de Dios en el hombre. Consideraciones en torno a la cuestión en W. Pannenberg,* "Scripta Theologica" (XII- 2013, vol. 45, n. 3), pp. 737-755.

[39] Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Faith and reality,* The Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1977, p. 49.

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