

# OBSERVATIONS WITH RESPECT TO THE FUTURE OF RELIGION PREFIGURED BY R. RORTY AND G. VATTIMO

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**Abstract:** *G. Vattimo and R. Rorty outline a faith without precepts and without a metaphysical God, as future of religion, after the deconstruction of Western ontology. The present paper signals the fact that the reductionist vision of the religion of the times to come, as undertaking of the law of love and of its charitable consequences risks to annul the religious character of love. A faith that programmatically undertakes charity in the absence of a metaphysic God is at most conviction. The rational-discursive approach mines the logic of religious faith. The restoring dimension of hermeneutics is more involved in the future of religion than its reductionist dimension.*

**Key words:** *deconstructivism, hermeneutics, religion, charity.*

## 1. Introduction

The shift of the philosophical interest in the field of language and of its relation with the being has affected the philosophers' options of reference to religion and religiosity. Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo agree in founding in liberty and charity the future religious attitude of humanity. The present paper sets out to signal the argumentative frailty of this basis.

## 2. Hermeneutics, Postmodernism and Religion at G. Vattimo

The history of metaphysics is comprised in the history of social institutions, G. Vattimo shows [5]. There is a history of the being and there is a fracture of history: before and after Christ. Atheism is possible in the history of revelation, salvation and dissolution of the being. In contemporaneity, the being must be constructed as event of the logos. The being is the result of the human dialogue.

The dialogue occurs in the political life. The future of religion is connected to the one of the church, with its structure, discipline and norms. Christianity is born by the church.

Heidegger presented his enunciations as answers to the situations in which he was involved, the Italian philosopher shows. Knowledge is always interpretation, Heidegger shows, and interpretation is the only fact we may talk about. Any tentative of surprising the authenticity of the interpretation unveils its historical character and even the thought that there are no facts, only interpretations has to be related to a determined historical context. Heidegger's ideas naturally place themselves in the epoch, resounding with the end of euro-centrism, with the psychoanalytical dethronement of the conscience and with the plurality of the sources of information, Vattimo deems.

„Christianity introduces within the world the principle of interiority, on whose basis

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objective reality gradually loses its determinant importance.” [5, p. 61], Vattimo shows. Hermeneutics is, from this perspective, development and maturation of the Christian message. The presupposition of the objectivity of the religion truth pushed religion in the deadlock of assuming as true the scientifically disputable enunciations in the Bible. The same presuppositions impede, Vattimo show, overcoming the inter-confessional misunderstandings in Christianity and of Christianity with other great religions. The solution comes, of course, from the renunciation of the objectivity pretensions. The only truth developed by the Scripture is „the truth of love, of caritas” [5, p. 66]. For Vattimo, postmodern nihilism, as dissolution of the concept of truth, is the truth of Christianity. The ideas of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Rorty are tributary to the biblical message founding the civilization in which they are formulated. Due to Christianity, the contemporary Westerners live the truth as experience and interpretation.

Vattimo proposes the explicit undertaking of the Christian historicity and deems charity the only chance for the survival of the West.

### **3. Hermeneutics, Secularization and Law of Love at R. Rorty**

To go out of the metaphysical logos means to declare your incapacity, contenting yourself with charity, R. Rorty shows [5]. The Christians’ shift towards the illuminist ideals signal the passage from God adored with strength to God adored with love. The passage from the metaphysical logos to the post-metaphysical reasoning and from strength to charity indicates at the same time the human’s inclination to stake on oneself rather than on an infinite power beyond oneself.

The decisive event, the fracture moment in the history of the being is not, as for Vattimo, Jesus’ birth, but the French revolution simultaneous to Romanticism. The contemporaries’ duty is directed towards the fellow citizens and civic responsibility may exist independently of the reason or of the religious belief.

Hermeneutics is for the intellectual world what democracy is in politics: a manner of taking over the Christian message about love as the only law.

Vattimo, Rorty shows, uses his philosophical strength in order to support the return to the religiousness from his youth. His theology, liberating religion from truth and sin forgiveness, is addressed to the lukewarm in faith. The embodiment is the sacrifice of the divine strength, of the divine authority and of the divine alterity. In embodiment, Gods cedes everything to people. This way, at Vattimo, secularization is the „constitutive feature of an authentic religious experience” [5, p. 48] and Jesus necessarily identifies Himself neither with truth, nor with strength, only with love. Vattimo places himself this way at the intersection of the reasoning traditions coming from Nietzsche and Heidegger, on one hand. and respectively, W. James and J. Dewey, on the other hand. In the point of intersection of the traditions, there is the undertaking of the research upon the truth as inter-subjective agreement. This undertaking pushes religion beyond the public and intellectual space. Rorty considers secularization as achievement of the embodiment promise, as God’s Self-giving to people, this implying the recognition of the private character of religion.

„The differences between Vattimo and myself reduce to his capacity of perceiving the sacred in a past event and my manner of having the feeling of the sacred as something that might dwell only into an

ideal future.” [5, p. 54] Rorty also shows. His feeling with reference to the sacred is connected to the future placement of society as a whole under the law of love. „This mystery, as the one of embodiment, is about the coming into being of a sort of docile, patient love, capable of bearing anything.” [5, p. 55].

#### **4. The Future Prefigured to Religion by R. Rorty and G. Vattimo**

Both Rorty, representative of the American pragmatic post-empirism, and Vattimo, representative of the European Latin postmodernism, deem that humankind is in the era of interpretation, era in which science, philosophy and religion interweave their competences, Santiago Zabala shows in the introductory study to these two papers upon the future of religion. [5]. For the philosophers of this era, the deconstruction of metaphysics prepares the undertaking of objectivity as linguistic consensus. The language structures the experience. In the field of interpretation, the language has historical character. Rorty and Vattimo deem that hermeneutics impede the philosophical research from assuming as object something that exists independently of the researcher. Any theoretical position is tributary to its historical conditions.

Philosophy opposes the authority's imposition of truth. The latter cannot be for the philosopher but the interpersonal dialogue unfolding in shared language. Historicity replaces therefore eternity, the philosopher undertaking this way a weak or weakened reasoning of the ontological. Consensus imposes historical truth, not the truth builds consensus.

Rorty and Vattimo are skeptical as regards the conditions of use of any concepts. In the encyclical *Fides et ratio* from 1998, Pope John Paul the 2nd indicated as the only source of the contemporary mistrust in truth and in the

cognitive resources of the human being, the shift of the interest in modern philosophy from the being to the human capacities of knowledge. Underlining its limits and conditionings, the philosophers seeded agnosticism, relativism and skepticism. Their fruit is the post-modern unfitness for essential questions regarding sense and the grounds of life. Zabala deems, on the contrary, that „the very loss of the trust in truth and the achievement to a substantial equivalence of all positions is the greatest success obtained through the deconstruction of metaphysics.” [5, p. 24].

For Rorty and Vattimo secularization is history of the weakened reasoning. Without being the abandonment of religion, secularization stands for paradoxical realization of its vocation. Numerous philosophers, scientists and theologians are non-religious or anti-religious from inertia, as an answer to dogmatic absolutism. The post-metaphysical era reopens for them the possibility of faith. Postmodern man has learnt to live in a world he cannot rely on, a world that does not supply ultimate grounds for knowledge and ethics and that guarantees in no way or time happiness. Secularization is, from this perspective, liberation and occasion for bringing reason in the proximity of the commandment of love. Solidarity, charity and irony are practices associated to the liberating undertaking of postmodern human condition.

Hermeneutics may help religion to liberate from the metaphysical tasks alien to itself, liberating reasoning from the pretensions of objectivity and connecting salvation to interpretation and edification. According to Rorty and Vattimo, faith evolves towards a sphere of the private, individualizing itself and gradually losing its appetite of the assumed appurtenance to a church. Overcoming the absolutism and the superimposition of the truth and

authority opens the possibility of approaching God fearlessly. The only truth of Christianity is the call to love. Postmodernism overcomes the requirement of the objective truth. For this reason, Christianity can no longer fulfill its doctrinaire, moral and disciplinary functions. Rorty and Vattimo outline a belief without precepts and without a metaphysical God as future of religion after the deconstruction of Western ontology.

### 5. Critical Observations

A first observation aims at the inconsistency of a faith with no precepts and without God. Such a faith, imposing charity, may be easily deemed as grounds for a beneficial human character. However it is not necessarily religious. Religion constitutively needs the believer's relation with another ontological register. The metaphysical tasks are not alien to religion; they are intimately and by definition connected to outlining a representation of the transcendent.

The post-metaphysical liberation from dogmas and dogmatic absolutism reopens for the contemporaries the possibility of faith, Rorty and Vattimo state. However, faith is constitutively transcendental and therefore valuating. Faith is crediting, trusting and entrusting. It implies undertaking a system of values and placing into a hierarchy the world values, in compliance with this system. Faith operates deductively, the manifestations it determines are substantiated by the value assumed as supreme. Crediting and trust may be inductively justified. They generate convictions. Entrusting, as transfer of the self-responsibility upon the bearer of the supreme value, means its implicit acknowledgment. As gift and abandonment, entrusting differentiates faith from conviction. The contemporaries may be convinced that there is a good

thing for humankind the charity as generalized practice. Their conviction may be the result of the experiences registered in humankind's recent history. In order to become religious, the valorization of charity has to be supported through anchorage in transcendent. It needs, in the way in which Kant settled this, a guarantor. In his absence, it is an approach for the camouflage of the profane within the sacred. This approach would occur inversely to the camouflage of the sacred within the profane that M. Eliade spoke of [3]. A faith that programmatically undertakes charity in the absence of a metaphysical God is at most conviction.

From this perspective, the religion of the future as it is outlined in the writings of Rorty and Vattimo is at most heresy, which places the human instead of God, similar to the manner in which communist regimes did.

Another observation aims at the reductionist character of the rational-discursive justification of the charitable behavior as being religious. The rational-discursive approach mines the logic proper to faith. G. Simmel showed that if an aspect of life acquires the status of ultimate instance of the latter, this generates the feeling of inexistence of a certain contradiction. Out of the understanding of religion as coherent totality there ensues its immovability. There is a logic proper to religion, as there is a logic of art. The religious men live a different life from the theoretical, artistic or practical men, a life with rhythm, tonality, ordination and proportions of one's own soul energies. The religious vocation imposes experiencing as religious all dimensions of life. The religious tonality may be enhanced pre-eminently in the human's behavior towards nature, towards destiny and towards one's fellow men. Certain facts have religious significance, as their

rough material was undertaken through the category of the religious. [6].

The feeling of the numinous cannot be described through feelings with human reference but through analogy, as Rudolf Otto showed [4]. He deems the logic-descriptive approach as inadequate to the comprehension of the numinous.

In extension of the idea of inadequateness, there takes shape another observation, seeing the role attributed to hermeneutics in transforming religious thinking. Rorty and Vattimo connect the hermeneutic idea of the multitude to the paths of knowledge equally enabled by the abolition of the metaphysical pretension of the objective truth. This connection exploits the reductionist dimension of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics also has a restoring dimension. G. Durand deems the latter as prevailing in the economy of the evolution of humanity [2]. In this order of ideas, the path diversity legitimated by hermeneutics unveils its compatibility with the Christian idea of personal and personalized salvation. Only under the sign of this compatibility, the shift of religion from the public towards the private is the surviving condition of religion. Only to the extent in which it programmatically allows the individualized relation with the transcendent, supporting the behavior determined by this relation, hermeneutics is responsible of the evolution of religion.

In the same order of ideas, the defining operation with the symbols also points out for the restoring dimension of hermeneutics. For G. Durand, the symbol is a non-arbitrary sign in which the significant is concrete and the signified is impalpable and invisible. The relation of inadequateness between the significant and the signified predestines the symbolic type of sign under the form of expression of the religious expression. In relation to the transcendent, any manifestation of the sacred in the religious experience remains

inadequate [2]. Hermeneutics, in its strong heideggerian vision, as specific manner of being meets, thereby with Eliade's idea of religiosity, as essential, defining human feature [3].

From this perspective, the secularization is in decline. At this point, there will be inserted another observation, aiming at the reason of metaphysics deconstruction in the evolution of the human. Rorty and Vattimo pre-eminently signal the liberating dimension of deconstructivism, dimension correlative to the awareness by the human being of the fact that he cannot rely but on himself. The reverse of this liberation is however the loss of the meaning and of the trust in truth. The success obtained at this price through the deconstruction of the metaphysical reference to the world is the success of the human against the human. This last one has intrinsically the need for sense and trust. For this reason, deconstructivism should be deemed rather as interval of reorganization than moment of success in the history of thinking. Humankind seems to cyclically exercise the faculty of methodic doubt. Deconstructivism may be deemed a contesting approach within this range. However, such a vision values it not through its demolishing dimension, but through the future constructions made possible through the initial purification of the terrain. Deconstructivism is a useful stage in the development of human knowledge not because it liberates the human from the constraint of attributing a sense to his behavior, but because it prepares the terrain for the undertaking of future sense.

In the light of these future assumptions, a last observation obediently places itself hermeneutically in the proximity of the first. The observation refers to the status of love in the future of religion. Rorty and Vattimo deem love as the only truth predicated by the Gospel and the

imposition of the law of love as sufficient ground for the post-metaphysical religion. However love should be perceived as soul-uplifting and soul-saving in order to be religious. Does love have in itself a transcendental dimension? Does love transfigure the loving one, prefiguring the transcendent? These questions of platonic filiation naturally insert in the proximity of asserting the religious character of love. They operate openings towards the ontology of the human. If and only if their answers are affirmative, the law of love as unique law of humankind and universal charity, its corollary, acquire religious character. However in this case, love changes the parameters of the human, producing a methanoia, a conversion.

## 6. Conclusions

The reductionist vision upon the religion of the future as undertaking of the law of love and of its charitable consequences risks to annul the religious character of love. Without losing its beneficial character, without transcendent guarantor, the commandment of love does not generate faith, but civic convictions.

Operating with symbols, hermeneutics can support the evolution of religion and religiosity. However, deconstructivism is of use to religion only to the extent in which it prepares a future reconstruction of the sense of human life.

From the deconstructivist perspective, the concept of charity, around which Rorty and Vattimo build their position with respect to the future of religion, is used as little legitimately as any of the concepts with whom metaphysics ever operated. From the perspective of the different logics which rule laic logic and religion, any non-religious cognitive approach aiming at

religion and religiosity is illegitimate and inefficient, failing its target. God's existence is not proved, it is observed, Paul Evdokimov deemed [apud. 1], differentiating the Western and Eastern traditions of Christianity. "7. What we cannot talk about should be silenced", Wittgenstein stated [7]. Philosophical writings upon religion of Rorty and Vattimo do exactly the contrary. Which is the very thing the present approach does, too, wishing to be the very wittgensteinian throwing of the instrument after its use.

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