The Architecture of Silence and Post-Secularism

At the outset of *Faith as an Option*, author Hans Joas questions the causal relationship between modernization and secularization. According to many 20th-century philosophers and sociologists, modernization in the West would lead not only to a freeing of public conscience from the illiberal and obscurantist legacies of religions, but also to their complete disappearance. Today, sociological and statistical research conducted by the most important international research institutes describes a general and unexpected “return to the sacred” and a renewed presence of religions in the public sphere. The theory of secularization is no longer able to reflect the multifaceted aspects of our contemporary societies. Today, we are instead witnessing a de-privatization of religion: “Religious traditions throughout the world refuse to accept the marginal and privatized role that the theories of secularization and modernity had reserved for them.”

Religions return to the public arena to redefine the boundaries of influence in the relations between social duties and ... of sociological research, it is increasingly common to define this orientation as a “post-secular religious condition.”

Post-secularism and religious identities

It is from this post-secular perspective that one can make a phenomenological reading of religious experience that is not ... pluralization and diversification of faith communities with regard to religious confessions of ancient tradition”...; the diffusion of new forms of trans-confessional religiosity based on inclusivism (a person can contemporaneously ... of neo-fundamentalist or neo-integralist currents (also in the Western Christian context), which claim new certainties.

The adhesion to new forms of religiosity and the development of fundamentalism also place us before the development of ... with rigid moral concepts often developed from a fundamentalist and literal interpretation of the sacred texts.

There has emerged in many parts of the world a trans-religious approach that conveys a spirituality without God, or more ... analysis of our time has not demonstrated conclusively that the secular age has been replaced by a post-secular age.

The secularization described by Charles Taylor is an extremely important key to the interpretation and understanding of ... by all the effects of secularization, but also by the new spiritual readiness that living in secularity causes.”

Rooms of silence and inter-confessional spaces

The post-secular experience has changed the relationship between people and the urban spaces where they socialize. To the ... the past (churches, political party offices, cultural circles, etc.) the post-secular person prefers the “third places”...: spaces of sociality and debate, places of leisure and intellectual sharing, metropolitan crossroads where they can ... of spontaneous belonging. This sense of belonging is favored by the design of easily accessible and comfortable spaces.

The intuition of American sociologist, Ray Oldenburg, who became famous following the publication of his book *The Great ... places” become “anchors of community life,” aimed at facilitating wider integration and a growing desire for sharing.

Today, these places have often replaced the traditional spaces of aggregation; for example, places of worship and city ... intra by the emerging perspective of post-secularity and the aspects described by Ray Oldenburg in *The Great Good Place.*

An evident effect of this emancipation of the sacred from places traditionally used for worship and socializing can be ... have attracted curiosity and interest: the “quiet rooms” often located in airports, hospitals, hotels and universities.
These inter-confessional “chapels” came about thanks to an initiative of Dag Hammarskjöld, a Swedish diplomat, and the UN. Hammarskjöld’s idea was to create a space open to every person, believer or non-believer, a place for reflection and prayer. This would be a room without a name or an altar, because “it is the task of those who enter to fill the void with what is at the center of their inner stillness.”

The Swedish diplomat directed the project personally: he wanted a bare space limited to essentials, full of peace. This was not an altar to an unknown God, but “it is dedicated to the God whom people adore under many names and in many forms.”

The UN “quiet room” soon inspired the spread of new meditation spaces not connected to one single confession. Today, in many hospitals, universities, and other places, these “quiet rooms” are used by people of different creeds (or non-believers) to stand before God and their conscience.

These “quiet rooms” are not spaces for dialogue, that is, a dialogue understood in an explicit sense, but rather places of listening. They are not only empty spaces, but emptied, to give voice to silent, broken, interrupted words.

The construction of these rooms in many hospitals in countries throughout the world has been accompanied with a continuous desire to “promote a brotherhood among people, between nationalities and ideologies and a continuous exhortation against violence and racism.”

At universities, too, it is more and more common to find rooms used as inter-religious chapels, or spaces for worship by people of faith. A study revealed that 70 percent of the reservations for the university’s common rooms were made for religious activities.

Conclusion

As Leon Battista Alberti once said, “being together generates form.” The examples quoted above are certainly a positive contribution to generating communion, a pedagogical place that expresses the reality of community through spaces of mutual acceptance.

How can these places be created without giving in to a naive syncretism, or a simple physical juxtaposition of different religions and people of faith? "It is the task of those who enter to fill the void with what is at the center of their inner stillness." This requires an authentic and sympathetic dialogue between us, religions and people, generating a necessary immune system against fundamentalisms and a dangerous return to extremisms.

References

[2] Hans Joas uses the definition of secularization which Charles Taylor summarizes according to three categories: “Public … devoted believer, is only one possibility among others” (C. Taylor, L’età secolare, Milan, Feltrinelli, 2009, 12-14).
[3] In 2015, the sociologist Rodney Stark published important sociological research on religion, comparing data from 163 countries: “It is estimated that the number of religious people has decreased from around 82% in 1970 to a figure around 7 percent: see M. Introvigne – P. Zoccatelli, La Messa è finita?, Caltanissetta – Rome, Sciascia, 2010.
[8] Here, what comes to mind is the Starbucks coffee chain, which offers armchairs, Wi-Fi and welcoming places for sharing; it is actually a real meeting place. For this reason, actual shopping centers, with restaurants and clubs where you can share impressions and comments on the films shown.

Note

These rooms were often built in prisons and hospitals, places where reflection on pain is imposed with dramatic evidence.


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