

## Economy, Ethics and Religion

After several decades of its long announced "disappearance", during the last years it is possible to verify a return of religion in the whole world, both in the spheres of private life and public debate. Contrary to the theory of secularization, that held the necessary process of decay of the religious phenomenon that would follow all the regions of the world going into the process of modernization, we are witnessing a search of religious meaning in life of people belonging to diverse social, cultural and economic groups. In terms of sociology of religion, it can be statistically verified a growing expansion of beliefs and religious practices of many sectors of the population of all the countries that, not many years ago, declared themselves agnostics or atheists.

On the other hand, at the same time that all sorts of religious or quasi-religious beliefs and practices of a variety not seen before prove fruitful, there is the phenomenon of de-institutionalization of the great traditional religions. In the case of the latter, we witness certain continuity in adhering to some beliefs, but also a strong rejection of a growing majority of the full acceptance of the dogma of faith, and of the liturgical and moral practices derived from the former. Especially in Europe, and also, to a lesser extent, in Latin America, Christianity is the religion that is possibly suffering more from this process, especially in the sphere of traditional Protestant Churches and the Catholic Church. Thus, the return of religion is not free of ambiguities. On the one hand, the sentiment and the religious quest has reignited, but on the other hand, this quest presents some characteristics that assimilate it often to the dominant narcissistic and individualistic style that many authors have described as characteristic of the postmodern individual.

Moreover, many analysts of contemporary culture and society are drawing attention to the problems that have been brought by the de-institutionalization of religion, especially in the realm of politics and the economy in recent years. Within this latter perspective, the analyses made in the area of the French left-wing are particularly striking. For authors such as Marcel Gauchet (*Democracy against itself*) and, more recently, Emmanuel Todd (*After Democracy*), the difficulties of both democracy and the European economy in recent years, are largely due to the collapse in many parts of the great traditional religious institutions, especially the Catholic Church. Todd notes, for example, how the de-institutionalization of Catholicism in regions such as Bavaria, Rhineland, northern Italy, northern Spain and Ireland, not only explain much of the deterioration of Christian-based political cultures in these countries, but also the moral decadence of the political cultures of socialist or liberal sign, which, although in opposition, they nevertheless depended on the former. Once Catholics' sacred religious or ethical values were missed, says Todd, the Socialists and Liberals' values disappeared as well. The result is a generalized pragmatism

that has disastrous ethical consequences both for politics and the economy. Between the de-institutionalization of religion, the political deinstitutionalization and the current economic crisis there is, for these authors, a continuity line.

Facing this situation, some proposals come forth that aim to recreate the institutional life of the deteriorated political and economic systems through a sort of ethical or even religious “re-institutionalization”. In this sense, in this issue of *Cultura Económica*, published in the midst of a new critical phase of the global crisis, we present an article by Luigi Pasinetti, in which the world famous Italian economist, Keynes’s disciple and author of the economic theorem that bears his name, draws a broad historical overview to show the impotence of conventional economic theory to account for the transformation that the world is facing. In this sense, he enhances the role of Christianity and, especially, of the Catholic Church, that through her Social Doctrine, has managed, in his opinion, to account and provide a theoretical and practical orientation framework of the past and present economic and social changes.

On the other hand, we also present the research work of the Italian economic historian Daniela Parisi, which, in prescient line with the recently published book of Giorgio Agamben, *Altissima Povertà, Regole monastiche e forme di vita*, refers to the Franciscan Order as model for a new type of economic and social institutional framework. In this sense, the author – as other analysts who conducted similar investigations of the institutional systems of the Benedictines or Jesuits – analyzes the social and economic value of the old Franciscan disciplinary forms as a way of restraint and redirection of social-economic forces today in state of increasing turmoil and dispersion.

In the third place, along the same line, the work of the auxiliary Bishop of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and specialist in business ethics, Anton Jamnik, presents the current state of the ethics’ discussion in marketing, proposing to extend the scope. In his opinion, in a deeply mercantile society, it is necessary to reach the ultimate questions related to culture and religion to gain an understanding and an ethically transformative practice in marketing activity.

Fourth, we publish a paper by Cecilia Díaz, professor and researcher at the Institute of Latin-American Economic Thought of the School of Economics of the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina (founded by the Romanian-Argentinian leading researcher Oreste Popescu), referring to the historical relations between economy and religion in the origins of the Latin-American University, specifically in Mexico. As a result of documentary research, the author shows how our continent also collaborated, in a leading role, in the formation of a Scholastic Economic Thought with an ethical and interdisciplinary dimension on which, according to the famous thesis of Joseph Schumpeter, great part of the economic thought of the Classical and Neoclassical Schools was formed later, though losing much of the qualities of the former.

Finally we offer our readers a 1985 paper – unpublished in Spanish – by the Pope Benedict XVI, then Cardinal Ratzinger, about the relationships between market economics and ethics. In this paper, presented at a symposium in Rome on “Church and Economy in Dialogue”, the current Pontiff foreshadows with striking clarity the causes of the current crisis of the capitalist system, associated especially with the loss of its ethical and religious grounds, “fundamental – in his own words – for the development of the political structures and the economic possibilities”.

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