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The return of the myth: postmodernity, religion and secularization according to Gianni Vattimo, Edgar Morin, and René Girard.

Abstract

La cultura dell'era tardo moderna ci ripropone un ritorno del "pensiero mitico" (e del mito). Cercheremo di affrontare il problema della demitizzazione e della secolarizzazione, attraversando la teoria mimetica girardiana, con l'ausilio delle interessanti interpretazioni di Vattimo e Morin.

Abstract

Late modern culture brings back a "mythical thought" and the myth itself. This paper will muse on the problems connected to demythization and secularization thanks to Girard's mimetic theory and Vattimo's and Morin's challenging interpretations of the matter.

** The present paper comes from some researches based on Italian sources and translations. Thus, to better understand the meaning of the original quotations reported in the main text, footnotes will offer an English translation of each quotation. Translations mine.*

Parole chiave

Myth, complexity, mimetic theory

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The world we live in, a postmodern and globalized world, dominated by technology and a kind of global economy, can certainly be defined as a "complex" world, whose idea of development seems to lead to an end of the history¹.

However, it is a world, as noted by Morin, whose development «con il suo carattere fondamentalmente tecnico e economico, ignora quel che non è calcolabile, misurabile, come la vita, la sofferenza, la gioia, l'infelicità, la qualità della vita, l'estetica, le relazioni

¹ Cfr. F. Fukuyama, *La fine della storia e l'ultimo uomo*, Rizzoli, Milano 1992.

con l'ambiente naturale²», everything, in short, that cannot be quantified, «come la generosità, gli atti gratuiti, l'onore, la coscienza³». Moreover, it is a world, whose Enlightenment and rationalist claims for long considered totems of modern science, cannot finally defeat man's deepest fears and cannot explain its highest expressions like emotions, poetry, art, and everything that comes from the so-called irrational sphere and, mostly, it cannot explain the very origin of rationality.

The fear of the indefinite, the fear of death, and the fear of the “other” are still being exorcised, in spite of any secular and scientific rationality, through the use of “old” religious and superstitious practices⁴.

We have before us one of the manifestations of the “mythical thought”, and of myth, in the culture of our late modern era. Now, despite its demystification of the myths in the light of the “non-sacrificial” reading of the Gospels, even Girard⁵, although in a tortuous way, can be part of that cultural horizon which aims to bring the myth back within a rationality that, beyond the limits imposed by the Enlightenment – according to Morin – can become “complex⁶”.

² Cfr. J. Baudrillard, E. Morin, *La violenza del mondo. La situazione dopo l'11 settembre*, Ibis, Como-Pavia 2004, pp. 56-57; “due to its fundamentally technical and economic nature, ignores what is not calculable, measurable, like life, suffering, joy, misery, quality of life, aesthetics, and the relationship with the natural environment”.

³ Ivi, p. 57. “such as generosity, free acts, honor and conscience”.

⁴ On our part, we will try to keep an equal distance apart, both from a dogmatic rejection of rationality and a dogmatic rejection of dogma by a simplifying and reductive rationality. We will always fluctuate, in short, between doubt and faith.

⁵ Cfr. G. Vattimo, *Credere di credere*, Milano, Garzanti 1996; *Dopo la cristianità. Per un cristianesimo non religioso*, Milano, Garzanti 2002; *Oltre l'interpretazione. Il significato dell'ermeneutica per la filosofia*. Laterza, Roma-Bari 1994, pp. 53-71. About the relations between Christianity, religion and secularization, the philosophical debate has been, in recent years, rather heated and dominated by the comparison between Vattimo's philosophy and Girard's anthropology. For a first approach to this debate, see: R. Girard, G. Vattimo, *Verità o fede debole? Dialogo su cristianesimo e relativismo*, cit. See also, R. Rorty, G. Vattimo, *Il futuro della religione. Solidarietà, carità, ironia.*, edited by S. Zabala, Garzanti, Milano 2005. Vattimo's thesis draw on the insights of Max Weber, argued more recently by Marcel Gauchet, who states that Christianity is “the religion which exits from religion”, i.e. that secularization – and then secularism – are essentially products of Christianity, cfr., M. Gauchet, *Il disincanto del mondo. Una storia politica della religione*, Einaudi, Torino, 1992. About the concept of the “disenchantment of the world” according to Max Weber see, M. L. Giacobello, *Pensiero e giudizio in Max Weber e Hannah Arendt*, Armando Siciliano, Messina 2009. Of considerable interest, furthermore, can be considered the thesis exposed by Mauro Ceruti and Giuseppe Fornari in *Le due paci. Cristianesimo e morte di Dio nel mondo globalizzato*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2005. Moreover, we also record another interesting, (since is very peculiar) comparison – almost a counterpoint to the previous – the one between the theologian Joseph Ratzinger and the philosopher Marcello Pera, whose liberalism – while moving from the feyerabendian anarchism – seems to arrive to Ratzinger's “foundationalism” and “anti-relativism”, (cfr. M. Pera, J. Ratzinger, *Senza radici. Europa, relativismo, cristianesimo, islam*, Mondadori, Milano 2004).

⁶ Cfr. E. Morin, *Al di là dei lumi*, in “Complessità”, I, 2006, pp. 14-19.

The recovery of the myth through Morin's complex thought has some interesting similarities compared to Vattimo's hermeneutics, in which the recovery of the myth becomes a whole with that secularization process⁷, inaugurated by Nietzsche and continued in Weber and Löwith's reflection. A still ongoing process, in which the Girardian reflection on Christianity, seen as a desecration process, wouldn't have – according to Vattimo – a marginal role at all:

Quanto a Girard, il suo discorso riguarda la civiltà umana in generale: il cui cammino, secondo lui, va dalla nascita del sacro – che esorcizza la violenza di tutti contro tutti concentrandola sulla vittima sacrificale, ma lasciandola dunque sopravvivere come base delle istituzioni – fino alla sua demistificazione da parte dell'antico testamento e di Gesù: quest'ultimo mostra che il sacro è la violenza, e apre la via a una nuova storia umana che, anche contro la terminologia e i propositi di Girard, possiamo ben chiamare secolarizzata⁸.

Vattimo's tendentious interpretation seems to lead Girard's thought towards a weakening of the Western metaphysics "strong" truth (with its elements of "presence" and "foundation"). It seems to be just Christianity⁹ (which Girard opposes both to the sacred and the myth) to have a leading role in the transition towards secularization and towards the concept of the "weak" truth, without foundation, that characterize this part of our late modern era. A Christianity that, in Vattimo's vulgate, is declined in a secular manner and it is even brought "out from religion"¹⁰.

A Christianity which is declined in a "Nietzschean sauce", in short, with a look to Jesus and to the "overman" of the philosopher of the eternal return¹¹.

⁷ For the relations between Christianity and secularization, see G. Fornari, "Redenzione dal sacrificio o nel sacrificio? Secolarizzazione e cristianesimo", in M.S. Barberi, S. Morigi (eds.), *Religioni, laicità, secolarizzazione. Il cristianesimo come "fine del sacro" in René Girard*, Transeuropa, Massa 2009, pp. 131-183.

⁸ G. Vattimo, "Il mito ritrovato", in *La società trasparente* (1989), Garzanti, Milano 2000, pp. 60-61: "As for Girard, his speech is about the human civilization in general: whose path, according to him, goes from the birth of the sacred – that exorcises violence of all against all, concentrating on the sacrificial victim, but leaving it thus survive as the basis of the institutions – up to its demystification on behalf of the Old testament and of Jesus. The latter shows that the sacred is violence, and opens the way to a new human history, even against Girard's terminology and intentions, we may well call secularized".

⁹ According to Girard, Christianity is "the key to understand mythology (...) if you want to understand mythology, if you want to dissolve the problem of the myth" – explains the anthropologist – "ask to Christianity. If you understand that Oedipus is accused of patricide and incest – not only by Freud, but by the Greeks – when in fact he is innocent, and even Jesus, innocent, is accused, in some folk beliefs, of the same faults, then it becomes clear that through the Christianity, myth can be read completely in a different way" (R. Girard, G. Vattimo, *Verità o fede debole? Dialogo su cristianesimo e relativismo*, a cura di P. Antonello, Transeuropa, Massa 2006, p. 35).

¹⁰ Cfr. G. Vattimo, *Credere di credere*, cit.

¹¹ Cfr. G. Vattimo, *Al di là del soggetto. Nietzsche, Heidegger e l'ermeneutica*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1981. According to Vattimo, *Uebersch* "should be translated rather than with Superman with 'man of the beyond', assigning the prefix an adjectival function (...) the *ueber* of the *uebersch* by Nietzsche, therefore, does not allude to a dialectical overcoming (...), instead it is thought on the characteristic structure, according to Nietzsche, of the hermeneutic experience" (Ibid, p. 29).

It is the myth of Nietzsche's "overman", in fact, to "incarnate" and synthesize, according to Vattimo, the spirit of secularization as "fate" of our culture in late modernity. A myth, which is closely related to that of the "death of God"¹², intended – in line with Vattimo – as an incarnation, *Kénosis*: «un indebolimento della sua potenza trascendentale che ci ha storicamente condotto alla conseguente destrutturazione di *tutte le verità* ontologiche che hanno caratterizzato la storia e il pensiero dell'uomo¹³». The "death of God" would mean, in this way, a rebirth of man, that man (the over) which Nietzsche relied on – this time in a totally nihilistic, secular and anti-metaphysical dimension – "the sense of the earth".

Nevertheless – reflecting the fact that the "transvaluation" of Christianity and the resulting nihilism are still thought by Nietzsche «all'interno d'un estremo orizzonte cristiano¹⁴», also the "over-man" would end up absorbing the (Christian) values of charity and love.

It is in this perspective that the anti-metaphysical and Nietzschean postmodern nihilism becomes – according to Vattimo – «la verità del cristianesimo¹⁵».

This process of secularization¹⁶, which crosses and marks our postmodern culture, as an expression of its own destiny, is matched, by Vattimo, to the phenomenon of "demythification of demythologizing", seen as the definitive impossibility of emancipation of reason – still supported by those last followers of history of metaphysics, both idealistic-type and positivist-type – from mythical forms of thought:

Il processo di emancipazione della ragione è però andato al di là di quello che idealismo e positivismo si aspettavano: molteplici popoli e culture hanno preso la parola sulla scena del mondo, ed è divenuto impossibile credere che la storia sia un processo unitario con una linea continua verso un *telos*. La realizzazione dell'universalità della storia ha reso impossibile la storia universale. Con ciò anche l'idea che il corso storico potesse pensarsi come

Vattimo explicits the link between the Nietzschean conception of the 'overman' and the overcoming of the metaphysical dimension of subjectivity, so the *Ueberschensch* would perform the beyond-passing of metaphysics that vice versa, according to Heidegger, Nietzsche was constitutionally not allowed. For the Turin philosopher, therefore, the *Ueberschensch* cannot be thought of as a subject. The hermeneutical openings of Vattimo's Nietzsche's interpretation move from this background acquisition".

¹² Even Vattimo (due to the Girard's influence, probably) does not consider "so absurd to argue that God's death which is announced by Nietzsche [may be], in many ways, the death of Christ on the Cross narrated in the Gospels" (R. Rorty, G. Vattimo, *Il futuro della religione*, cit., p. 50).

¹³ R. Girard, G. Vattimo, *Verità o fede debole? Dialogo su cristianesimo e relativismo*, cit., p. IX; "a weakening of its transcendental power that has historically led us to the consequent disintegration of all ontological truth that has characterized history and human thought".

¹⁴ S. Givone, "Introduzione" a F. Nietzsche, *Verità e menzogna*, Newton Compton, Roma 2005, p. 29; "inside of an extreme Christian horizon".

¹⁵ R. Rorty, G. Vattimo, *Il futuro della religione*, cit., p. 54; "the truth of Christianity".

¹⁶ About an interpretation which rejects the idea of modernity as secularization, see. H. Blumenberg, *La legittimità dell'età moderna* (1966), Marietti, Genova 1992. On the relations between Christianity, secularism, religion and hermeneutics, see *Oltre l'interpretazione*, cit., pp. 53-71.

Aufklärung, liberazione della ragione dalle ombre del sapere mitico, ha perso la sua legittimità. La demitizzazione è stata riconosciuta essa stessa come un mito¹⁷.

Nonetheless, the recovery of the myth (and of religion) by a postmodern secularized consciousness can only take place in a framework of a truth “weakened” general experience and, paradoxically, not as an opposition movement to the modernization, but as a result of an extreme (but not definitive) destination:

La cultura moderna europea è così legata al proprio passato religioso non solo da un rapporto di superamento ed emancipazione, ma anche, inseparabilmente, da un rapporto di conservazione-distorsione-svuotamento: il progresso ha una sorta di natura nostalgica, come classicismo e romanticismo dei secoli scorsi ci hanno insegnato. Ma il significato di questa nostalgia diviene manifesto solo con l’esperienza della demitizzazione portata fino in fondo. Quando anche la demitizzazione è svelata come mito, il mito recupera legittimità, ma solo nel quadro di una generale esperienza “indebolita” della verità. La presenza del mito nella nostra cultura attuale non esprime un movimento di alternativa o di opposizione alla modernizzazione; ne è invece un esito conseguente, il punto di arrivo, almeno fino ad ora. Il momento della demitizzazione della demitizzazione, anzi, si può considerare il vero e proprio momento di passaggio dal moderno al postmoderno¹⁸.

Secularization, as a corollary of modernization, does not take place, however, through a definitive abandonment of tradition, «ma attraverso una sorta di interpretazione ironica di essa¹⁹». That is how Vattimo, with an explicit reference to the philosophy of Nietzsche, clarifies this concept:

demitizzare la demitizzazione non significa restaurare i diritti del mito; se non altro perché tra i miti a cui dobbiamo riconoscere legittimità c’è anche quello della ragione e del suo progresso. La demitizzazione, o l’idea della storia come emancipazione della ragione, non è qualcosa che si può esorcizzare tanto facilmente. Nietzsche aveva già mostrato che quando si scopre che anche il valore della verità è una credenza fondata su esigenze vitali, dunque

¹⁷ G. Vattimo, “Il mito ritrovato”, cit., p. 57; “The process of emancipation of reason, however, went beyond what idealism and positivism expected: many peoples and cultures took the floor at the scene of the world, and it has become impossible to believe that history is a unitary process with a continuous line towards a telos. The realization of the universality of history made universal history impossible. With this, also the idea that the course of history was thought according to *Aufklärung*, liberation of reason from the shadows of the mythical knowledge, has lost its legitimacy. Demystification recognized itself as a myth”.

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 61; “The modern European culture is strictly related to its religious past not only by an overcoming and emancipation relationship, but also, inseparably, by a kind of retention-distortion-emptying relationship: progress has a nostalgic nature, such as classicism and romanticism of past centuries have taught us. However, the significance of this nostalgia becomes manifest only with the experience of demythologizing brought to the end. When even the demystification is proved to be as a myth, the myth recovers legitimacy, but only as part of a general experience “weakened” from truth. The presence of myth in our current culture does not express an alternative or opposition to modernization movement; it is instead a consequent outcome, the point of arrival, at least until now. The moment of the demystification, indeed, is yet the real moment of transition from modernity to postmodernity”.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 59; “but through an ironic sort of interpretation of it”.

un “errore”, non si restaurano semplicemente gli errori precedenti: continuare a sognare sapendo di sognare come dice il passo (...) della Gaia Scienza, non equivale certo al sognare puro e semplice. Così accade con la demitizzazione (...) una volta svelata la demitizzazione come un mito, il nostro rapporto con il mito non ritorna ingenuo, ma rimane segnato da questa esperienza (...) La parola di Nietzsche nella Gaia Scienza non è solo un paradosso filosofico, è l’espressione di un destino della nostra cultura: questo destino si può indicare con un altro termine: quello di secolarizzazione²⁰.

The awareness of the errors of religion and myth within the secularization of the European spirit of late modern era would not lead, then – according to Vattimo – to their final deletion, but to their paradoxical survival, made of both conservation and overcoming²¹. The postmodern subject, according to the philosopher from Turin, «se guarda dentro di sé alla ricerca di una certezza prima, non trova la sicurezza del

²⁰ Ivi, pp. 57-58; “Demythologizing the demythologization does not mean restoring the rights of the myth; not least because among the myths towards which we must recognize legitimacy there is also that of reason and of its progress. The demythologization, or the idea of history as emancipation of reason, is not something so easy to exorcise. Nietzsche had already shown that when the value of truth turns out to be a belief founded on vital needs, therefore a “mistake”, not simply we restore the previous errors: keep on dreaming while realizing that’s a dream as the passage of the ‘Gaia Scienza’ claims..(...), is not equivalent to some plain and simple dream. So happens with the demythologization (...) once the demythologization is revealed as a myth, our relationship with the myth returns naive, but remains marked by this experience (...). Nietzsche’s word in the ‘Gaia Scienza’ is not just a philosophical paradox, it is the expression of a destiny of our culture: this destiny can be specified with another term, that of secularization”.

²¹ In this same perspective – in theological context – the work of Rudolf Bultmann, the protagonist of the twentieth-century debate on demythologization, is based on. What the German theologian – whose thought moves from a reconsideration of Heidegger’s philosophy exposed in *Essere e tempo* – tries to do is to extract the *Kerygma* or *Logos* from the “myths” in the Bible and update the existential content of which they are charged, contrasting the darkness of dogma which may obscure it after centuries. About Bultmann see in particular: *Dibattito sul mito* (1948-1952), Antologia, Milano 1969 – a monumental work in six volumes published in Hamburg between 1948 and 1962 under the title *Kerigma und Mithos* which bears witness of a heated debate between hermeneutics and theology on this topic; *Credere e comprendere* (1933-1965), Queriniana, Brescia 1977. While acknowledging in Bultmann the intent to update the myth and defining his attitude more than a demystification a “unliteralization”, Coupe does not give in to the temptation to define the German theologian as a debunker (cfr. L. Coupe, cit., pp. XVI-XVII). That of Bultmann is only one page of the large chapter of relations between theology and hermeneutics, so see also: K. Barth “La parola di Dio come compito della teologia” (1922), in *Le origini della teologia dialettica* (1962-63), edited by J. Moltmann, Queriniana, Brescia 1976 pp. 236-258; E. Fuchs, *Ermeneutica* (1970), CELUC, Milano 1974; D. Bonhoeffer, *Resistenza e resa* (1951), Bompiani, Milano 1969; G. Ebeling, *Parola e fede* (1960), Bompiani, Milano 1974; M. Blondel, *Storia e dogma* (1904), Vallecchi, Firenze 1922. For the relations between myth and fundamental dogma see H. Blumenberg, *Elaborazione del mito* (1979), Bompiani, Milano 1991, pp. 271-326. Still in the field of interpretation, a particular interest in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures has also characterized the activity of Paul Ricoeur.

cogito cartesiano, ma le intermittenze del cuore proustiane, i racconti dei *media*, le mitologie evidenziate dalla psicanalisi²²».

As Vattimo writes,

E' questa esperienza, moderna o anzi postmoderna, ciò che il "ritorno" del mito nella nostra cultura e nel nostro linguaggio cerca di catturare; e non certo una rinascita del mito come sapere non inquinato dalla modernizzazione e dalla razionalizzazione. Solo in questo senso, il "ritorno del mito", se e nella misura in cui si dà, sembra indicare verso un superamento dell'opposizione tra razionalismo e irrazionalismo; un superamento che però riapre il problema di una rinnovata considerazione filosofica della storia²³.

However, Vattimo's reflection seems to move, then, towards Morin's direction of a "doublethink Mythos / Logos²⁴". The myth found in the late modernity culture (or planetary era, to quote Morin) cannot reject, therefore, rationality, and Vattimo seems far away from the nostalgia of anti-modern "archaism". Now, it is in this direction that seems to go even Girard's thought. Despite its demythologization, in fact – we agree with Coupe – Girard seems to make, at the same time, a "remythologizing":

Forse però, malgrado la visione di Girard, secondo cui il cristianesimo decostruisce la logica del sacrificio, la fede che egli abbraccia può essere considerata come qualcosa di più che una demitizzazione. Il suo scopo non è, infatti, sostituire al *mythos* il *logos*, se con quest'ultimo s'intende una dottrina gerarchica. Semmai, egli corregge un tipo di storia per mezzo di un'altra. Il cristianesimo non è meno mitico della storia del capro espiatorio che egli riscrive. Cosicché, si può dire che Girard attui una demitizzazione in quanto respinge l'interpretazione letterale (...) Ma allo stesso tempo, si può dire compia una rimitizzazione, in quanto sottoscrive il potenziale simbolico del racconto cristiano²⁵.

²² G. Vattimo, "Il mito ritrovato", cit., pp. 61-62; "if it looks inside itself in search of a first certainty, it won't find the certainty of the Cartesian *cogito*, but the Proustian heart intermissions, the media stories, mythologies highlighted by psychoanalysis".

²³ Ivi, p. 62; "Whatever the 'return' of the myth in our culture and in our language tries to capture is indeed this modern or postmodern experience, and certainly not the rebirth of myth as an uncompromised knowledge free from modernization and rationalization. Only in this sense, the 'return of the myth', as far as it is given, seems to point towards overcoming opposition between rationalism and irrationalism; an overcoming that also reopens the question of a renewed philosophical consideration of history".

²⁴ Cfr. E. Morin, *Il metodo 3. La conoscenza della conoscenza*, tr. it., Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2007.

²⁵ L. Coupe, *Il mito. Teoria e storia*, cit., p. 119; "Perhaps, despite the vision of Girard, according to which Christianity deconstructs the logic of sacrifice, the faith he embraces is considered as something more than a demythologization. His purpose is not, in fact, to replace mythos to logos, if the latter is considered as a hierarchical doctrine. What is more, he corrects a kind of history by means of another. Christianity is no less mythical history than the scapegoat that he rewrites. Therefore, we can say that Girard implements a demystification since he rejects the literal interpretation (...) but at the same time, we can say that he accomplishes a remythologizing, because he endorses the symbolic potential of the Christian story".

Girard, therefore, seems to implement a “re-mythologizing” precisely to the extent that he “endorses the symbolic potential of the Christian story”. Even Christianity, in fact, has the power of a Vichian myth, as Morin states:

il mito cristiano del resto è un mito allo stato nascente: essenziale, indeterminato, misterioso. Tutti coloro che cercheranno di stabilire la natura dei rapporti fondamentali della Santissima Trinità, di accettarvi una gerarchia razionale o logica, si romperanno la testa, o se la faranno rompere (...) Il Dio-creatore-padre, il Dio-redentore-figlio, lo Spirito-Santo-mana restano in uno stato di felice indeterminatezza, che si sottrae a ogni arida elucubrazione. E' vero perché assurdo, proprio perché non ci si capisce niente: è al di là della comprensione umana. Inutile domandarsi se il figlio è un uomo divenuto Dio, o un Dio divenuto uomo; la logica “mistica” ordina: è Dio ed è uomo²⁶.

Rather than in the light of arid theological ruminations, Christianity would seem to clear up better, then, in the light of the myth and its paradoxical logic. Even religion, for that matter – as stated by Vico –, would be nothing but a fantastic universal, produced by man’s mythical and poetic sphere. A sphere that could be called (according to Vico), *lato sensu*, aesthetics, and could accommodate, saving it from the current crisis, the same religious sphere. Then, religion might even be a part of that kind of “poetic state” that humanity has lost, running after the “myth” of a scientific reason for too long. As Morin says, in fact, «tutto ciò che è mitologico, magico e religioso può salvaguardarsi, al di là della credenza nell’estetica. C’è una grande comunicazione occulta o sotterranea tra la sfera mitologica e la sfera estetica²⁷».

The “recovery of the poetic state”, wished by Morin, could be, in this way, one of the possible outcomes of the Girardian reflection. A recovery in the name of a reason that, being analytical and scientific, becomes “historical” and concrete, according to thinkers such as Vico and Croce²⁸.

Through recovering mythical thought (not opposed to rationality, according to the meaning given by Morin and Vattimo), we might, perhaps, retrieve that kind of religion – as Girard shows us – which contains the roots of our knowledge. This could help us, even (or perhaps, above all) nowadays, to face the challenges of the world, in today’s secularized society. Moreover, as noted by Pierpaolo Antonello:

²⁶ E. Morin, *L'uomo e la morte*, cit., pp. 214-215; “Furthermore, the Christian myth is a myth in its early stage: essential, indeterminate, mysterious. All those who will try to determine the nature of the fundamental relations of the Holy Trinity, or to accept a rational or logical hierarchy, could break their head, or could have it broken (...). The God-creator-father, the God-redeemer-son, the Holy-Spirit-Mana remain in a state of happy indeterminacy, which is not subject to any arid rumination. It is true because absurd, just because we understand nothing: it is beyond human comprehension. Needless to wonder if the son is a man become God, or a God become man; the ‘mystical’ logic orders: it is both God and man”.

²⁷ E. Morin, *Il Metodo 5. L'identità umana*, op. cit., pp. 118-119; “all that is mythical, magical and religious can safeguard itself, beyond the aesthetic belief. There is a great hidden or underground communication between the mythological and aesthetic area”.

²⁸ Cfr. G. Gembillo, *Neostoricismo complesso*, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Napoli 1999; and, G. Gembillo, *Le polilogiche della complessità*, cit.

Partendo dai presupposti teorici girardiani, la secolarizzazione non consisterebbe infatti in una semplice “scomparsa del religioso”, ma nel propagarsi dell’azione demistificante e anti-sacrificale del Cristianesimo lungo i suoi duemila anni di storia. La secolarizzazione come evento eminentemente storico è un processo evolutivo che manifesta un andamento sussultorio, con avanzamenti e regressioni, in modi e forme ancora tutte da determinare e da descrivere ma tendenzialmente “progressivo”, per quanto “inattuale” il termine possa suonare alle nostre orecchie di scettici post-moderni²⁹.

Girard accepts the *kenosis* of God in certainly less optimistic views than Vattimo, by bursting, rather than settling, all its ambivalences. Therefore, the Girardian Christianity becomes an “apocalyptic” experience where, «più si va verso un mondo in cui il rito è morto, più quel mondo si fa pericoloso³⁰».

A world without the sacred and violence is, paradoxically, a more dangerous world, because it no longer has the means and rituals to exorcise violence itself. The postmodern “Cold war”, in this respect, could be read as a residual of the sacrificial order.

Girard states that:

Gli uomini hanno sempre trovato la pace all’ombra dei loro idoli, ossia della loro violenza sacralizzata, e, ancora oggi, cercano questa pace al riparo della violenza più estrema. In un mondo sempre più desacralizzato, solo la minaccia permanente di una distruzione totale e immediata impedisce agli uomini di distruggersi tra loro. E’ sempre la violenza, insomma, che impedisce alla violenza di scatenarsi. Mai la violenza ha esercitato con tanta protervia il suo duplice ruolo di ‘veleno’ e di ‘rimedio’. Non sono gli antichi carnefici del *pharmakos* a dirlo, e neppure dei cannibali ornati di piume, sono i nostri specialisti della scienza politica. A dar retta a loro, e possiamo crederci, solo l’arma nucleare mantiene ai nostri giorni la pace del mondo. Gli specialisti ci dicono senza battere ciglio che soltanto questa violenza protegge (...) Sotto qualunque aspetto la si consideri, la minaccia attuale somiglia ai terrori sacri e richiede lo stesso tipo di precauzioni. Si ha sempre a che fare con forme di ‘inquinamento’ e di ‘contaminazione’, scientificamente identificabili e misurabili, ma non per questo ricordano meno i loro corrispettivi religiosi. E per respingere il male, non c’è altro mezzo che il male stesso. Qualsiasi rinuncia pura e semplice alla tecnologia pare impossibile: la macchina è consegnata così bene che sarebbe più pericoloso fermarsi che continuare ad andare avanti. I mezzi per la propria sicurezza bisogna cercarli nel cuore stesso del terrore. L’infrastruttura nascosta di tutte le religioni e di tutte le culture si sta ora rivelando. Con le nostre mani fabbrichiamo, per poterlo contemplare, il vero dio dell’umanità, quello che nessuna religione riuscirà più a camuffare. Non lo abbiamo sentito arrivare perché non viaggia più sulle ali palmate degli angeli delle tenebre, e appare sem-

²⁹ P. Antonello, “Realismo e secolarizzazione. Eric Auerbach e René Girard”, in M.S. Barberi, S. Morigi (eds.), *Religioni, laicità, secolarizzazione*, cit., p. 3; “Starting from the Girardian theoretical assumptions, secularization does not consist in a simple ‘disappearance of the religious’, but in the propagation of the demystifying and anti-sacrificial action of Christianity along its two thousand years of history. Secularization as eminently historical event is an evolutionary process that manifests a sussultatory pattern, with advancements and regressions, in ways and yet all forms to determine and to describe but basically ‘progressive’, as far as the word ‘outdated’ may sound to our post-modern skeptic ears”.

³⁰ R. Girard, *Origine della cultura e fine della storia*, cit., p. 202; “the more you go to a world where the rite is dead, the more that world becomes dangerous”.

pre, ormai, dove nessuno se lo aspetta, nelle statistiche redatte dagli studiosi, nei settori più desacralizzati³¹.

Moreover, the secularized world, paradoxically, is not able to find peace “beyond its idols”. And the new idol of the modern era, the new *pharmakos* – both as a poison and a treatment – is the nuclear device. The current peace, in fact, rather than the daughter of the desecration would be, again, a residual product of the sacred:

Quello che rende i nostri comportamenti analoghi ai comportamenti religiosi non è un terrore veramente sacro, ma un timore perfettamente lucido dei pericoli che un duello nucleare farebbe correre all’umanità. La pace attuale poggia su una valutazione freddamente scientifica delle conseguenze uniformemente disastrose, forse persino fatali, che avrebbe per tutti gli avversari l’uso massiccio delle armi nucleari³².

The Christian experience, however, is an apocalyptic experience, and only in apocalyptic terms could clarify Christ’s following words: “I came to bring a sword and not peace”. Once again Girard states:

Il sentimento apocalittico è sapere che il processo di decomposizione del meccanismo del capro espiatorio si è concluso e che quindi niente può più accadere. Del resto, cos’altro può succedere dopo la rivelazione cristiana? E allo stesso tempo, cosa succederebbe nel mondo se l’ordine precario della falsa trascendenza imposta dal meccanismo vittimario smettesse di funzionare? Ogni esperienza cristiana è apocalittica, perché ci si rende conto

³¹ R. Girard, *Delle cose nascoste sin dalla fondazione del mondo*, cit., pp. 319-320; “Men have always found peace in the shade of their idols, that is to say their sacralized violence, and, still today, they seek this peace sheltered from the most extreme violence. In an increasingly secularized world, only the permanent threat of total and immediate destruction prevents men from destroying each other. It is always violence, in short, which prevents violence to run wild. Violence has never before exerted with so much arrogance its double role as ‘poison’ and ‘treatment’. Neither the ancient executioners of *pharmakos* nor the cannibals adorned with feathers are to state this, but just our specialists of political science. According to them, and we may believe it, only the nuclear weapon maintains peace in the world nowadays. Specialists say, without batting an eyelid that only this violence protects us (...) under whatever aspect we may consider, the current threat seems similar to the holy terrors and requires the same kind of precautions. We always deal with forms of ‘pollution’ and ‘contamination’, scientifically identifiable and measurable, but that does not let us forget about their religious counterparts. Furthermore, to reject evil, there is no other means than the evil itself. Any plain and simple renunciation of technology seems impossible: the machine is so well thought out that it would be more dangerous to stop than to continue. We need to look into the heart of terror to find our own safeguards. The hidden infrastructure of all religions and all cultures is now revealing. We manufacture, with our own hands, the real God of humankind, just to contemplate him, the one that no religion will be able no longer to disguise. We haven’t heard him arriving because he no longer flies on webbed wings of the angels of darkness, and he always seems to appear, where no one expects him, in those statistics compiled by scholars, in the most desecrated sectors”.

³² Ivi, p. 321; “What makes our behaviors similar to religious behaviors is not really a holy terror, but a perfectly logic fear of those dangers that a nuclear duel could cause to humankind. The current peace is based on a harsh scientific assessment of the uniformly disastrous consequences, perhaps even fatal, that the massive use of nuclear weapons might have for all opponents”.

che, dopo la decomposizione dell'ordine sacrificale, niente più si frappone tra noi e la possibilità della nostra distruzione³³.

The feeling of the end, which the apocalyptic Christianity carries with it, is, however, “long way far” as Girard says, from the end of the history, « annunciata da Fukuyama, ultimo virgulto dell'ottimismo hegeliano³⁴».

Christianity, therefore, desacralizing the “false transcendence” of the victim mechanism, exposes the world to an unusual violence, whose epilogue does not promise any happy conclusion. Girard's reflection, at this point, seems to be tangled up in a sort of Gordian knot. With no apparent way out (in fact, the violence of the sacred defeated by Christianity would seem to grant, paradoxically, peace).

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN ECOLOGICAL CHRISTIANITY?

As a result of our reasoning, we just need to look for some possible outcomes of the Girardian point of view. A position that, as we have tried to expose, straddles between the myth and the demythologizing.

Besides offering an exciting unitary theory of the origin of culture (almost a kind of story that seems to come from hominization origins to postmodernism), it introduces, with great cognitive and emotional tension, one of the most important challenges of the planetary era. That one of ethics. A Christian one, but also paradoxically secular³⁵. An ethic, that, recovering religion, could be declined even in the light of an “ecological thought”. The same way as the “systemic-ecological” thought (and the “complex thought”, to quote Morin), in fact, even the Girardian theory would seem to put man in an earthly universe, just to avoid him escaping from ethical commitments:

La croce ha distrutto per sempre il potere catartico del meccanismo del capro espiatorio. Di conseguenza, il Vangelo non propone nessun “lieto fine” alla nostra storia, ma ci offre due opzioni, cioè ci offre libertà di scelta, esattamente quello che le ideologie non permettono mai! Il Vangelo ci permette di imitare Cristo e abbandonare la nostra violenza mimetica, o di imitare Satana e correre il rischio di autodistruggerci. Il sentimento apocalittico si fonda su questo rischio³⁶.

³³ R. Girard, *Origine della cultura e fine della storia*, cit., p. 184; “The apocalyptic feeling knows that the decomposition process of the scapegoat mechanism is over and then anything can happen. After all, what else can happen after the Christian revelation? And, at the same time, what would happen in the world if the precarious order of the false transcendence imposed by victimage mechanism stopped working? Every Christian experience is apocalyptic, because one realizes that after the decomposition of the sacrificial order, nothing more stands between the possibility of our destruction and ourselves”.

³⁴ R. Girard, *Portando Clausewitz all'estremo*, cit., p. 79; “announced by Fukuyama, the last bloomer of the Hegelian optimism”.

³⁵ C fr. M. Ceruti, G. Fornari, *Le due paci*, cit., pp. 183-192.

³⁶ R. Girard, *Origine della cultura e fine della storia*, cit., pp. 184-187; “The cross has forever destroyed the cathartic power of the scapegoat mechanism. Accordingly, the Gospel does not propose any ‘happy ending’ to the story, but offers us two options, that is to say, it gives us freedom of choice, exactly what ideologies never allow! The Gospel enables us to imitate Christ and aban-

As Girard states,

Il tema apocalittico cristiano è il terrore umano e non divino, quello che tanto più rischia di trionfare in quanto gli uomini si sono meglio liberati di quei sacri spauracchi che i nostri umanisti credevano di demolire di testa propria e rimproveravano al giudeo-cristiano di perpetuare troppo. Eccoci ora liberati. Sappiamo di essere tra noi, senza un castigamatti celeste che disturbi le nostre faccende. Bisogna dunque guardare non più indietro ma avanti, bisogna mostrare di cosa l'uomo è capace. La parola apocalittica decisiva non dice nient'altro che la responsabilità assoluta dell'uomo nella storia: volete che vi sia lasciata la vostra dimora; ebbene vi è lasciata³⁷.

Despite the vocabulary of faith, Girard's speech seems to raise the ethical challenges of Edgar Morin's "ecological thinking":

Dio e Satana non sono fuori di noi, non sono neppure al di sopra di noi, sono in noi. La peggiore crudeltà del mondo e il meglio della bontà del mondo sono nell'essere umano. Il bene è condannato a essere fragile, ciò significa che dobbiamo abbandonare ogni sogno di perfezione, di paradiso, di armonia. È sempre minacciato, perseguitato. Ciò significa anche che induce a un'etica di resistenza. E possiamo resistere alla crudeltà del mondo e alla crudeltà umana con la solidarietà, l'amore, la relianza³⁸ e la commiserazione per coloro che ne sono le vittime più sfortunate. Il combattimento essenziale dell'etica è la doppia resistenza alla crudeltà del mondo e alla crudeltà umana. "È impossibile che il male scompaia", sosteneva Platone nel Teeteto. Sì, ma bisogna cercare di impedire il suo trionfo³⁹.

don our mimetic violence, or to imitate Satan and run the risk of destroying ourselves. The apocalyptic feeling is based on this risk".

³⁷ R. Girard, *Delle cose nascoste sin dalla fondazione del mondo*, cit., p. 252; "The Christian apocalyptic theme is the human terror and not the divine one, which is the more likely to triumph due to men who now are better freed of those sacred scaremongering that our humanists believed to demolish themselves and reproached the Judeo-Christian to perpetuate it too much. However, now here we are, freed from this. We know it is just us, without a celestial bogeyman disturbing our affairs. We must therefore look not back but forward, we have to show what man is able to do. The decisive apocalyptic word does not say nothing but the absolute responsibility of man in history: you want your home to be left; well, it's left".

³⁸ The notion of reliance, invented by the sociologist Marcel Bolle de Bal, fills a conceptual void attributing a substantive nature to that which had been conceived only as an adjective, and providing an active character to this noun. *Relié* (tied) is passive, *reliant* (tying) is participating, *reliance* (legance) is activating. We can talk about *Deliance* (non-legance) to oppose it to reliance, [In Italian we prefer to translate the French neologism reliance with "relianza", so as to keep the play on words between *relier* (tie) and *Alliance* (Alliance). Translator's note], (E. Morin, *Il metodo 5.*, op. cit., p. 214).

³⁹ E. Morin, *Il metodo 6. Etica*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2005, p. 197; "God and Satan are not outside of us, are not even above us, they are inside us. Both the worst cruelty of the world and the best part of goodness of the world coexist in the human being. This goodness is condemned to be fragile, which means that we must abandon any dream of perfection, of paradise, of harmony. It is always threatened, persecuted. This also means that leads to an ethic of resistance. In addition, we can resist the world's cruelty and human cruelty with solidarity, love, reliance and pity for those who are the most unfortunate victims. The double resistance to the world's cruelty and human cru-

The approach to reality, in a secularized society of the planetary era, whether it wants to escape the abyss of the progressive apocalypse⁴⁰, can only be, then, what Fritjof Capra defines a “deep ecological awareness”. The word apocalyptic, in fact – as stated by Girard – , “says nothing but the absolute responsibility of man in history”. The Avignon, in the same manner of Benedetto Croce, seems to say to the planetary era man, after the crisis of the metaphysical basis, that nothing is left but history⁴¹. Moreover, history is calling for Christian ethics, to avoid the abyss towards which we seem to go through inevitably. As Vattimo states, «la verità che secondo Gesù ci farà liberi non è la verità oggettiva delle scienze, e nemmeno la verità della teologia (...) è la verità dell’amore, della Caritas⁴²».

A kind of truth that would take strength from its own weakness. A truth, again, that would increase, thanks to what Humberto Maturana calls the “knowledge of knowledge”. Such as the kind of awareness that states, «il nostro non è il solo universo, ma uno dei *multiversi* in coesistenza con i molti altri degli altrettanto molti altri nostri simili⁴³». An awareness that would prevent us, at last, to avoid «veri e propri obblighi etici⁴⁴». The eth-

elty consists in the essential fight of ethics. ‘It is impossible that evil disappears’, argued Plato in Theaetetus. Yes, but we need to try to prevent its triumph”.

⁴⁰ Cfr. E. Morin, *Oltre l'abisso*, Armando, Roma 2010.

⁴¹ Cfr. B. Croce, *La storia come pensiero e come azione*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2002. According to the interesting interpretation of David D. Roberts, today we can recover Croce by only inserting him in the broader context of the post-metaphysical philosophy which, starting from Nietzsche and Heidegger, comes to Gadamer’s hermeneutics, to the weak thought of Vattimo and to Rorty’s pragmatism, and passing through the metaphysic post-structuralist “deconstruction” implemented by Derrida and Deleuze. Only “in the light of the issues that have engaged philosophers, from Nietzsche to Rorty, and that brought them to the fore, we can better understand Croce’s reasons and to which logic the peculiar set of reasons, that characterizes his thought, obey to. From this broader perspective, today he gains his place among the most distinguished pioneers of the post-metaphysical thought”, (D. D. Roberts, *Una nuova interpretazione del pensiero di Croce. Lo storicismo crociano e il pensiero contemporaneo*, Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, Pisa-Roma 1995, p.13). Moreover, Croce is certainly a forerunner of that post-metaphysical sensibility, recognizing the crisis of traditional philosophical foundations; he opens a world that does not give any space to the transcendent, while remaining firmly anchored to the immanence of history. About Roberts and Crocian thought we refer to *Roberts interprete di Croce*, in «Complessità» I-2, 2010, pp. 305-312).

⁴² R. Rorty, G. Vattimo, *Il futuro della religione*, cit., p. 53; ““the truth that, according to Jesus, will set us free is not the objective truth of science, and even the truth of theology (...) it is the truth of love, the caritas”. It is no coincidence, perhaps, if Vattimo’s return to Christianity, as a landing of his hermeneutic philosophy, materializes with an explicit reference to Croce who wrote “Non possiamo non dirci cristiani”.

⁴³ G. Giordano, “Humberto Maturana: biologia, linguaggio etica”, in *Conoscere è fare. Omaggio a Humberto Maturana*, cit., p. 92; “ours is not the only universe, but one of the multiverses in coexistence with the many others, as equal as many others, and similar to ours.”

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*; “actual ethical obligations”.

ics of the planetary era, however, will no longer be thought as in opposition to *Eros*⁴⁵, but – as Morin hopes – it will be, complementary to it.

We just have to end up with Edgar Morin's following words:

La fede etica è amore. Ma è un dovere etico salvaguardare la razionalità nel cuore dell'amore. La relazione amore/razionalità deve essere in relazione *yin* e *yang*, l'uno sempre legato all'altro e che contiene in sé l'altro allo stato originario. Questo amore ci insegna a resistere alla crudeltà del mondo, ci insegna ad accettare/rifiutare questo mondo. Amore è anche coraggio. Ci permette di vivere nell'incertezza e nell'inquietudine. E' il rimedio all'angoscia, è la risposta alla morte, è la consolazione. E' dottor Love che può salvare Mister Hyde. Paracelso affermava: "Ogni medicina è amore". Diciamo anche e soprattutto: "Ogni amore è medicina"⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ Cfr. S. Givone, *Eros/Ethos*, Einaudi, Torino 2000.

⁴⁶ E. Morin, *Il metodo 6. Etica.*, cit., p. 208; "The ethic Faith is love. However, it is an ethical duty to safeguard the rationality in the heart of love. The love/rationality relationship must have a *yin* and *yang* relationship, the one always related to the other and which contains within itself and the other to its original state. This love teaches us to resist the cruelty of the world, to accept/reject this world. Love is also courage. It allows us to live with uncertainty and restlessness. It's the anxiety remedy, it's the answer to death, it's the consolation. It's Dr. Love that can save Mister Hyde. Paracelsus stated: 'Every medicine is love'. Let's also and above all say: 'All love is medicine'".