

A Theistic Perspective of Poetic Expression

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DOI: 10.52744/AUCSFLSA.2022.01.02

Abstract:

The human being is placed between the aesthetic perspective of the world and the great adventure of truth, which cannot be named, but only intuited. This is the truth of the mystery, of the extramundane God, creator of cosmic harmony, who motivates time and space and, therefore, the divine nature of man. The vision of religious poetry is neither aporia nor anthropocentrism. We can observe an essentially religious thought in which origin and finality, time and eternity are imposed as necessary terms. In the vision of the authors of religious works in literature, the universe is the unfolding of the absolute and universal reason, of divine thinking, in which man, separated from virtuality by appropriateness to time and space, lives, opts and decides through attitude, seeking solutions to the problems of the spirit in the affective area. The recognition of the limits, of the status of a creature, awakens in man's soul the mystical fear in front of an absolute power, which transcends everything - space, time and man - and which presents itself as a mystery, the mystery somehow constituting the form of the qualitative content of the absolute, inaccessible force, that fascinates man.

Keywords: *phenomenology, conceptual thinking, ineffable, experience*

Introduction

In order to identify the religious substance of a literary work, a re-examination of the concept of the Sacred is required to be performed. We must therefore return to the origin of phenomenology, as a theory of knowledge circumscribed to other sciences and apply phenomenological analysis to religious feeling. First, however, we will perform an update on the concepts of „rational” and „irrational”. According to the theistic beliefs, especially the Christian one, divinity is thought of by analogy with the rational contingent, because, in a limited form, man perceives it in himself. The rational contingent is defined by means of clear concepts, which are considered as absolute and are accessible to rational analysis, such as „spirit”, „consubstantiality”, „omnipotence” or „will”. Considering as

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rational a thing understood through such conceptual thinking, the essence of the divinity described with the help of these attributes can be designated as rational as well.

Only in this way is faith possible, understood as a conviction structured on clear concepts and superimposed on simple feeling. The indication of the superiority of a religion is the existence of concepts and a certain level of knowledge, crystallized in concepts of the transcendent. Christianity has concepts of superior clarity, which form a complex structure, an aspect that qualitatively differentiates it from other forms of religion. The summarization of the previously mentioned attributes and of similar ones would investigate the essence of divinity. It would be a one-sided interpretation if we did not consider that rational attributes existed. They have value only by reference to an irrational element and are defined as essential and synthetic attributes, which can only be understood if they are assigned to an object that has a supportive value. The opposition between rationalism and religion results directly from this dialectic.

Rationalism versus religious experience

The argument that rationalism would constitute the denial of the miracle and that its opposite would be its affirmation is false, because the theory that considers the miracle a transgression of the real, of the contingent is an absolutely rational theory. Between rationalism and its opposite there is rather a value difference starting from the affective content of faith, essentially determined by the ratio between rational and irrational in the idea of God. The question is whether the irrational is consubstantial with the rational or overwhelms it. Orthodoxy could be considered an expression of rationalism not in that it designed its doctrine as a goal, but in that it did not find the way to justify the irrational element of its object and preserve its vitality in religious experience, leading through this secondary placement of the irrational to the entire rationalization of the idea of God. The tendency to rationalize is dominant not only in theology, but also in studies on myths, in attempts to reconstruct the origins and initial elements of beliefs or in the research of primitive religions. Even if higher rational concepts are not used here from the very beginning, the essential problem is distinguished in them, being presented as the starting point of some concepts that also have natural features, that is, among those that can be identified in the general plan of human representations. Ignoring the specific element of religious experience, as it appears even in the most primitive manifestations of religion, does not mechanically lead to its annulment, for, of all the domains of human experience, only in the religious domain something peculiar to it appears and which can only be identified in it. It can be



observed that religion does not end with its rational statements, and attempts to shed light on the complex relationships between its elements have been solitary endeavors.

The Sacred – a complex category

A special category that belongs, as such, exclusively to the religious domain is the Sacred. It has been implanted in other fields as well, for example in ethics, but it does not have its roots there. The sacred is a complex category, which includes a completely separate element, which evades the rational in the terms defined above and which, remaining totally inaccessible to conceptual understanding, has an ineffable specificity. The sense in which the word „sacred” is used in certain expressions by philosophers and theologians is rather figurative. We usually understand it as an attribute equivalent to absolute morality, the absolute good. When we talk about the sacred character of the duty or the law, we only have in mind the generally valid character of obligation and its practical necessity, so such use of the word is not rigorous, because the Sacred includes morality, without being limited to it exclusively. It preemptively designates a separate component that sublimates morals and transcends any rational element. This vital component in all religions constitutes their most intimate part and has an amazing vigor in the Semitic religions, especially in the biblical ones. In the languages of these religions, the terms that designate it („qados”, „hagios”, „sanctus”, „sacer”) imply the idea of the good. The word „sacred”, by which we translate these terms, is the effect of an ethical schematization and overbidding of an original affective reflex that, in itself, can be detached from what is ethical and, as such, researched for itself. For this category that designates the Sacred, Rudolf Otto created the word „numinous”: „Since this category is completely sui-generis, it, like any original and fundamental data, cannot be defined in the strict sense of the word, but can only be analyzed”².

The novelty and originality of the perspective of Otto's „Das Heilige”, published in 1917, consists in the analysis of religious methods, and not of the ideas of God. He sheds light on the rational and speculative side of religion. For Otto, God is not an abstraction, but an extraordinary power, manifested through divine „wrath”. In his attempt to identify the features of this irrational experience, he discovers the feeling of fear in front of the Sacred, in front of what is called „mysterium tremendum”, in front of the „majestas”. He experiences religious fear in front of „mysterium fascinans”. Otto designates these experiences as numinous because they are caused by the report of an aspect of divine power. In front of the

² Otto, R. (1996). *The Sacred*. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia Publishing House, p. 71



numinous, man has the feeling of being a mere creature and understands his own nullity and depreciation. The feeling of being a creature is an underlying subjective element, it is like the projection of another feeling, namely that of fear, which is also related to an object outside the ego, which is precisely the numinous object. Only by applying the category of the „numinous” to an object, real or supposed, can the feeling of being a creature appear in the soul, as a reflection of it.

Based on the Kantian theory of knowledge, Otto believes that knowledge, awakened by external impressions, generates the „numinous”: „It springs from the source of the deepest knowledge, which is in the soul itself, probably not independently of certain external data, nor prior to certain sensible experiences, but arising due to them”³. In Rudolf Otto's opinion, the category of the Sacred is a primary factor underlying an inner revelation, but independent of mental reflection. It manifests itself as a power of a different order from the natural one, as a force that is not of an impersonal order, but that occupies a place in the ontological order. It stands at the center of religion, but only as an incomparable value. The experience of the Sacred is the experience of the transcendent and the ineffable.

Man's religious instinct is based on the irreducible character of the Sacred. This a priori category and, from a logical point of view, prior to any sensible perception, explains religion as a phenomenon. Starting from the sensible reality, the intuition of the Sacred leads to pure reality. It is precisely in this inner revelation that the origin of religions must be sought. From an irrational, mystical point of view, the Sacred expresses the religious feelings that manifest when man reacts to various phenomena. From a rational point of view, this category generates the ideas of absoluteness and perfection. Otto believes that the necessary ideas, especially the idea of God, of the soul, of the experience of freedom, do not need to be demonstrated, since they come from pure reason, a source of knowledge independent of experience. Man's discovery of the eternal and free Being - that is God - is an „a priori” discovery that evades any demonstration. Along with the ideas of soul and freedom, it contains the rational foundation of religion, whose domain is mystery, which is never revealed. Religion has two aspects: that of mystery and that of experience. The religious experience is the response of the man who is in front of the mystery and who encounters the mysterious power. The mission of religion is to preserve the mystery in its integrity through the symbol - the only possible language. The concept offers no access to the mystery. Religious language necessarily goes through the filter of intuition. Starting from the

³ Otto, R., op. cit., p. 89



sensible reality, intuition leads to pure ideas: it creates feelings and a relationship with higher realities. Therefore, the feeling warns us that we are facing eternal realities. Thanks to symbols, religious knowledge perceives the eternal, but in an intuitive manner. Salvation is based on this perception, which consists in the spiritual union with God.

From Kant to Eliade – the Sacred as a surreality

The religious man perceives the sacred as a surreality, but identifies its manifestation in the phenomenal. According to Mircea Eliade, the „homo religiosus” belonging to peoples who have not mastered the skill of writing is able to discover the Sacred. Theoretic consciousness and its awakening effect are the terms of understanding the transsubjective world. The real as an idea, as an essence, as an absolute unity, represents a main concern for man. It is not about an absolutization of concepts, but about the inner need to get out of the limitations of sensorial conditioning. Interweaving the truth and the thought does not cancel the errors generated by the senses. Kant also affirmed it through the ability of producing representations (Kant:2008). One can discuss the validity of the Platonic ideas, the lower rank of sensory representations and the game of appearances, but the search for certainty in transcendence is a great conquest of the human spirit. The man awakened by the sensible world and mastered by the category of participation is a seeker of the real, conceived as absolute. In Rudolf Otto's opinion, the discovery of the Sacred happens only because of this original disposition of the spirit, which causes, under the influence of external facts and sensible experiences, the numinous to spring from the depths of the soul, as if from a deep source of knowledge.

The phenomenon of the Sacred in all its complexity is presented by Mircea Eliade in „Sacrul și profanul”. Eliade explored the archeology of religious man's behavior by analyzing the archetype and the symbol. Man can discover the Sacred because the symbol directly communicates the message to him. In Mircea Eliade's conception, religious symbolism realizes the permanent solidarity between man and sacredness. „The sacred is an element of the structure of consciousness, and not a moment in the history of consciousness [...] The experience of the Sacred is inextricably linked to man's effort to build a world that has meaning.”⁴

Religiosity in poetry as the ultimate structure of consciousness

Religiosity is independent of the numerous oppositions between the Sacred and the Profane. It is a defining human trait, even though modern

⁴ Eliade, M. (1992). *Sacrul și profanul*. București: Humanitas Publishing House, p. 18.



societies seem to lack religious beliefs. The religious man assumes a specific way of existence in the world and regardless of the historical context in which he lives, „homo religiosus” believes in the absolute reality - the Sacred - which transcends this world, but which finds forms of manifestation precisely within it and therefore sanctifies it and makes it real. For him, life is of sacred origin and the human existence saturates and actualizes all its valences to the extent that it is religious. The atheistic man assumes an existential situation that refuses transcendence and even doubts the meaning of existence. In other words, he does not recognize another model of humanity outside the human condition. Man is his own condition, but he only succeeds in perfecting himself to the extent that he desecrates the world. The Sacred is the opposite of his freedom, therefore man could become himself only under the condition of total demystification. However, the non-religious man descends from „homo religiosus”. In essence he was built from the situations assumed by his ancestor, therefore he is the result of a process of desacralization. The profane man is the result of a desacralization of human existence. However, he still retains traces of the religious man's behavior, because he cannot completely abolish his past.

Any existential crisis calls into question the presence of man in the world and the very reality of the world; if at the beginning the being is confused with the Sacred, the essence of the existential crisis is of a divine nature. The experience of the Sacred establishes the world and any religion is an ontology. Religion is the exemplary solution to all existential crises not only by its repeatability, but also by the fact that it is considered to be of transcendental origin. By going beyond the values of the contingent, it opens the way to the world of the spirit. If the religious vocabulary is the vehicle through which man specifies his relations with divinity, then the poetic expression is the visible result of a religious experience and constitutes an element of the discourse through which „homo religiosus” gave an account of his experience.

The human being is placed between the aesthetic perspective of the world and the great adventure of truth, which cannot be named, but only intuited. It is the truth of the mystery, of the extramundane God, creator of cosmic harmony, who motivates time and space and, therefore, the divine nature of man. Religious poets' vision is neither aporia nor anthropocentrism. In religious poetry we can observe an essentially religious thought in which origin and finality, time and eternity are imposed as necessary terms. The consciousness of the state of a creature, of its finitude in relation to the creative divinity, gives man some remnants of his original prestige.



In the vision of the authors of religious works in literature, the universe is the unfolding of absolute and universal reason, of divine thinking, in which man, separated from virtuality by appropriateness to time and space, lives, opts and decides through attitude, seeking solutions to the problems of the spirit in the affective area. The recognition of the limits, of the status of a creature, awakens in his soul the mystical fear in front of an absolute power, which transcends everything - space, time and man - and which presents itself as a mystery, the mystery somehow constituting the form of the qualitative content of the absolute, inaccessible force, that fascinates man. Love comes from fascination, as a consequence of assimilation. The element of solemnity, which is found in the deep silence of the ascent of the soul to the Sacred, constitutes the incipit of the fascination at the level of which lies what religions call salvation: the experiences of grace, „nirvana”, „bodhi” or the bliss-bringing vision of Christianity. The Sacred is perceived as absolute transcendent reality - God - but which manifests itself in the world. For the religious poet, the logic of the meaning of a sacred universe is the basis of the law of correspondences between the structure of the cosmos and human life. In their vision, life unfolds as a human existence from the moment it acquires the meaning of a transhuman existence.

All things considered...

As far as man is concerned, the feeling of impassability that separates him from God and the feeling of his own finitude are connected to the sublime. However, the status of a perishable being does not prevent man from carrying the Absolute within him. The consolation of the creature consists in the fact that it borrows something from the brilliance of the Creator and especially from experiencing the dignity and freedom obtained by knowing the truth in the form of the law. Perfection becomes possible through the existence of the objective law of death. The art of the sublime, which is inconceivable without the principle of identity, is sacred. It is the art of the divine, of the unique and infinite substance in time and space, or of God, as the sole Creator of the world. From this perspective, poetry is a noble art, in its attempt to express the sublime through its figures of speech, in Hegelian terms. The authors of religious poetry try to express the inexpressible, that which eludes the rational and remains completely inaccessible, that which carries neither form nor determination, and yet must be determined in concrete form, to make it accessible to sensitive intuition. Religious thinking foreshadows a pure theology, built on the relationship between divinity and man. It is the metaphorical expression of the inner revelation of the divine, which is the basis of personal religion. The identification of the self with God does not



appear as a way of immanentist thinking, in which a way out of is attempted through the autonomous construction of the moral universe, but it is an example of sublime art in which the religious and the aesthetic are intertwined. The consciousness of the relationship between the Creator and the creature, of the subordination of the creature, of its inferiority and nothingness, forms the object of the art of the sublime.

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