



The “Death of God” According To Joseph Moingt in the Work “God Who Comes to Man – From Mourning to Revelation”

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Abstract

The theme about the ‘death of God’ is an important discussion even for men of today. Because of it our article seeks to elucidate how some important theologians and philosophers faced that matter. For that, we will use, as a base for our written, the work “God who comes to man” by Joseph Moingt. The ancient vision of philosophy and theology about man and world could not be thought without the certain idea of God’s existence. Nevertheless, with the modern conception of metaphysics, the transcendence conception changed and this form of knowledge became more anthropologic. That route was open by Kant and Hegel. But with Nietzsche and Feuerbach the idea of God turned out to disappear from the horizon of man’s explanation for everything. Fear and necessity made man somehow to create God. This way, God is man and man is God. As a form of answer, Kierkegaard opened another way centered in the theme of existence, where it is possible to speak about God. Here phenomenology also gave some contributions. All those thoughts show that man’s openness to God cannot be denied, then they became a statement of God’s existence by themselves, giving the man the possibility to know Him.

Keywords: God; Death; Theology; Philosophy; Anthropology

A Word to Begin

Our article seeks to present the theme of “death of God” inside the work of Joseph Moingt¹. This subject is approached by our author in the fourth point of the chapter one (The mourning of God), named by Moingt as “From rejection to the waiting of God”.

We will follow, in the development of our article, the same scheme of the book. The foundation will be done with the work itself and with some works mentioned by the author.

1 Moingt J Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010.

In the first part, titled “from rejection to the waiting of God” we will see how Moingt does the route from Kant and Hegel’s contributions, like origin, with regard to a base for the later atheism. It is a more introductory part of the whole content.

Once we placed the bases for his reflection, we will see in the second part, in a clearly form, the theme “death of God”. The author makes an approach with emphasis, in a particular form, in Nietzsche’s and Feuerbach’s thought. The central question will be the rejection of the image of God presented by Christian faith and its consequences. We will see as the elder vision about man and world gave place to a vision more anthropocentric and independent of the traditional about

God, world and man.

In the third part, we will get, through Kierkegaard's thought, to the thinking centered in the theme of existence, which is seen as possibility condition to speak about God. We will follow some contemporary philosophers' thought that gave us possibility to speak of God inside the philosophy itself and also gave bases to many theologians.

In the last part, we will see how the thought of God prevailed along the centuries, even suffering many attacks, and how many philosophers get to the conclusion that man's openness to God is undeniable. This openness turned out to be an affirmation of God's existence, as well as the possibility of man to know Him.

From Rejection to the Waiting of God

Moingt begins his reflection about the theme "death of God" presenting the idea that the revelation theology learns how to exercise its reasoning in front of the modernity thoughts and, questioned by this modernity, it seeks to give reasons, thought a proper language, of what it believes and transfers².

"All was said in Kant about God's existence with regard to the reason; all was said in Hegel about the revelation of God-Trinity in the culture history; all was said, and all remains to be said, in the sense that the affirmation of God remains an option of reasonable liberty"³. Through this statement, Moingt introduces his thought.

The contemporary theology, because of its new situation in the society and in the culture, at the same time it permits a language change, it imposes to itself this language alteration to be able to transmit its message to men of today.

Moingt makes a route from the mid-nineteenth century to the last decades of the twentieth century. According to him, Kantism and Hegelianism present themselves as the end of the ancient metaphysics and as the beginning of a new metaphysics or anthropology⁴.

From that, it is given the tumultuous birth of this man's thought which seeks to be detached from the "theological philosophy". This reasoning stands out in the world with the announcement "God is dead". And the elaboration of that is given, above all, by Feuerbach and Nietzsche's atheism.

As an answer to the problem mentioned above, it emerges a philosophy with Kierkegaard that will start from the announcement of the death of Christianity, made by his contemporary. He will make a way safeguarding faith and introducing the "existence" concept in this new philosophical thought⁵.

The question of the idea of God, even being heavily attacked in this period, remains possible, in some contemporary philosophers, highlighting some great representatives like Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Lévinas, Heidegger...

With this hostile panorama to Christian faith, the theology of the twentieth century needed to position itself and did this, in a particular manner, in the anthropology field, highlighting, above all, the relations between faith and reason. In this theme, Karl Barth's thought stands out. In this same context, it is highlighted the question of human existence opened to a transcendence and receptive to an illumination received from revelation.

The "Death of God" - Feuerbach and Nietzsche

The generation after Hegel's death, his old disciples and his new readers did not understand the history theologization made by their master anymore. In this context, atheists' thoughts united to the criticism of Christianity emerged.

"Modern man longs for, more than never, to be thought from himself and no more according to his unique destination to God's Kingdom."⁶ His great objective was to become independent and to be able to make his own history without having to refer himself to a superior Reason or a Supreme Being.

In this context, the separation movement between religion and political society accentuated itself and the world lost the religious figure, under which there was the habit to think God. Somehow, this thought turns out to be present in the current reality.

The Hegelian System suffered some attacks which turned out to start a new reflection way. These are some examples: Feuerbach's humanism; Marx's materialism; Kierkegaard's Christian spirituality; Nietzsche's neopagan nihilism.

Marx's and Kierkegaard's posture, in a certain point, are

2 Moingt J Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 151.

3 Ibid., p. 151.

4 Ibid., p. 152.

5 Moingt J Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 152.

6 Moingt J Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 153.

similar: they unite with each other to separate terrestrial from divine; Feuerbach refuses the union of the Christianity with the Estate. That thought was shared by other thinkers. Nietzsche gets this process apex when he seeks to convert “philosophical theology” into “antichristian philosophy”.

Philosophical theology is turned by Feuerbach into a pure anthropology; by Marx into an object of a class socioeconomic analyses; Kierkegaard seeks to see the individual emancipated from the world and accomplishing human universality in a “being-himself” turned to God;⁷ Nietzsche highlights man’s displacement towards the “beyond-man” definitively free because of the “death of God”⁸. Except Kierkegaard, the other three ones join each other to refuse religion in general, and Christian in particular.

Feuerbach believes that Hegel’s philosophy would lead to religion rejection and he will separate from it to build an anthropology free from theology. To him, religion is nothing more than the human feeling of having his essence out of himself, and the divine essence, considered in its attributes, is not other thing than the man’s essence itself. Based on Lutheran conception (what God is for us), he defends the idea that “God is a word whose only sense is man”. In Faith, “God is thou of man”⁹.

Marx claims, from Feuerbach, that “Christianity essence” is anthropology, not theology. According to him, atheism is the only able to wake up man for the construction of a truly human world, whose the preliminary condition is Christianity destruction by socialism.

Christianity, to Nietzsche, is the kingdom of lies! “Death of God” would be the prelude of nihilism which would lead to the “eternal return”¹⁰.

Thereby, atheism is now “disguised” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The possible causes for that would be: transferring to man the divine essence predicates – “There where the ‘I’ cannot go beyond itself anymore, it thinks God” (Feuerbach).¹¹ The thought now is done from concrete, from empirical reality, not from abstract manner. Similarly, man is no longer thought from Descartes’ “I think”.

Anthropology becomes now anthropocentric, that is,

7 Moingt J Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 155.

8 Ibid., p. 156.

9 Moingt J Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 156.

10 Moingt J Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 156.

11 Ibid., p. 157.

atheological or atheistic. The “new philosophy” claimed by Feuerbach, places to itself as a task the “Hegelian philosophy accomplishment” under the absolute negation manner of the theology turned into pure and simple anthropology. The knowledge of God becomes the man’s himself conscience, according to Hegel.

Feuerbach defended that man’s misery would be God’s birth place: God is man and man is God, according to him¹².

Other factors which led to atheism were: economical order changes; discredit which relapsed over Christianity; the revolt against the social misery... Thereby, Feuerbach thinks a “new humanity era”, the “death of Christianity” one.

The disbelief supplanted faith; the reason substituted the Bible; Politics took place of religion and of the Church; the earth gave place to heaven; work substituted prayer; the material misery took over the place of hell; and man replaced Christian.

A practical atheism is present from all those reflections. The critical turns out to be more directed to the behaviors that the idea of God induces to the man who practices the religion than the idea of God in itself. Therefore, Feuerbach fixes the atheism thought over humanism: the question of God became the question about man.

Marx stars from Feuerbach and maintains that atheism and the destruction of the Christian religion are necessary to change the world.¹³ Based on his thought, many of his followers will work for this: destroying religion.

Nietzsche also will confirm the thesis that the human thought only reaches its perfection in the idea of God, according to Jünger¹⁴. Paul Valadier thinks Nietzsche’s atheism is opposed to Feuerbach’s. His atheism connects him to Schopenhauer, to his pessimism and to his nihilism¹⁵.

Nietzsche instead of enduing man with hypostatical divine attributes, accepts as starting point the nonsense of the existence, the living disgust, the refusal of the false consolations. To him, all religion was born from fear and from necessity¹⁶. It is interesting such thought approaches the current reality too much, in what many people seek religion for those reasons as well. According to him, under

12 Feuerbach L A Essência do Cristianismo. Petrópolis, Vozes, 2007, p. 209.

13 Moingt J Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 163.

14 Ibid., p.163.

15 Ibid., p.163.

16 Nietzsche F Humano, demasiado humano. São Paulo, Escala, 2011, § 110.

the word “God” the religious do not do any other thing than worshipping man himself – and the sick man; man always longed for himself while longing for God¹⁷.

Heidegger commented Nietzsche’s expression a lot: “God is dead” (“God remains dead and we were those who killed him, we who had erected him as supreme value”).¹⁸ The word God even if it aims at the Christian God, it designates the supersensible world, the Ideas and Ideals domain. The expression means that the supersensible world is without efficient power.

With the proclamation of the death of God it is expressed, first of all, the exhaustion feeling of the ancient world; man seeks to be conceived from himself.

The atheism of the nineteenth century has a dogmatically and aggressive character which then will be lost gradually. All atheisms of this period will have in common the fact of not consisting in metaphysical argumentations about God’s existence and nature.

Therefore, the “death of God” will be, above all, the death of religion, more precisely of Christianity. God is a belief and an institution which masks the emptiness of the human existence, its dissatisfaction, its fear.¹⁹

It will be, in this field, that theology will have to accomplish the faith defense. Thus, Kierkegaard lies its defense if not exactly of Christianity, at least of a Christian vision of the existence.

A Thought of Open Existence

Kierkegaard also saw himself obligated to get distance from Hegel. He considers himself as a “subjective thinker”, of subjectivity, interiority, existence... It is on the ground of the individual existence which the relationship with God must be thought, to him. The problem of this relationship opposes itself to the “subjective thinker”, to which he identifies himself and must understand himself in the existence.

A strong term, to him, is anguish which is connected to the feeling of sin – a fear of it and of its consequence. However, different from Nietzsche, the culpability according to Kierkegaard is not religious sickness, but school of liberty, decision, fight and overcoming of oneself, but in the conscience of the proper weakness. He has a way of thinking which has as a base no more the conscience theory or the being theory,

but the concrete human existence which will give origin to several existence philosophies and phenomenologies.

Kierkegaard’s theory of truth, to Jean Wahl, is, in the bottom, a theory of belief; belief is grace, it is belief in a transcendence and prove of that transcendence.²⁰

His theory of existence opens a path to a new form of philosophizing, in what theologians will seek anthropological preambles for faith. It will be, mainly, with him that the theological reflection will find a more fertile way to the announcement of faith inside the contemporary culture.

The Problem of God among the Philosophers of our Time

The “new philosophy” is born under the sign of dissolution of the “great Whole”. It is not unified by the thought about God anymore, who enters no more in its horizon. Its exhaustion is rooted by the irruption of the sciences of man.

To Merleau-Ponty, the determinist myth of a Being explanation by the science had engendered around 1900 a short rationalism which debouched in the falling of the metaphysical sense and in the negation of God; the contemporary atheism does not intend, like that one of 1900, to explain the world without God, it wants the world to be inexplicable²¹.

The idea of God suffers an exhaustion! The philosophical agnosticism, nowadays, is about to substitute the atheist rationalism. Nevertheless, the philosopher’s agnosticism does not impede to recognize the legitimate of a philosophy considered religious or Christian. Maurice Blondel tried, as a believer, a philosophical effort, according to Henri Bouillard²².

Another example, mentioned by Moingt, was Henri Bergson who does not come from Christian tradition, but he turned out joining it. His thought is considered pre-Christian, because it expresses a mystic experience. There is in his thought a kind of movement which it is not known ever if it is God who sustains men in their being a human or if it is the inverse, once to recognize his existence it is need to pass through ours²³.

After Blondel, it is, above all, in the existence philosophies

17 Moingt J *Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação*. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 164.

18 Nietzsche F *A gaia ciência*. São Paulo, Rideel, 2005, § 125.

19 Moingt J *Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação*. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 167.

20 Moingt J *Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação*. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 172.

21 Moingt J *Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação*. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 175.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 176.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 177.

that theology will seek an approach path in direction to God of Christianity.

Husserl's phenomenology would be a philosophy without absolute and without truly otherness, according to Paul Ricoeur. Nevertheless, this author highlights that Husserl's interest was that phenomenology lead to God²⁴. All paths lead to beyond the world and man, to God.

Inside the mid-twentieth century context, it appeared philosophers like Karl Jasper and Gabriel Marcel who are considered transcendence thinkers. Their thought gives the opportunity of a more fructuous dialogue between philosophy and theology.

The subject, to Jaspers, and the being cover themselves mutually and the transcendence is the embracing of every embracing, it is the Totally Other. G. Marcel asserts the transcendence of the revealed God who lets be questioned like an infinite Thou by any person involved in determined existential situations, above all that of love²⁵.

Among all phenomenologists and existentialist philosophers, M. Heidegger was the most sought by the most theologian. He interested for a Kantian anthropology, which, according to him, guided to an existential ontology.

To Heidegger, the philosophy task is to listen, in the anguish, to the voice of Being, origin of the human language. Two authors reacted in front of Heidegger's thought: the believer Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas and an agnostic, Eric Weil, both influenced the theological area²⁶.

Lévinas incommoded with Heidegger's term "Dasein" which would be a sign of a tragic thought that renounces all aid on the Eternal and becomes a testimonial of a time and a world that, perhaps, it will be possible to overcome tomorrow. Lévinas stands up in the Infinite idea in myself which does not come from myself, that precedes me and remains incomprehensible to me.

E. Weil believes it is in God that man sees himself, and what man sees in God is man himself, not like an atheist thought, for God is not denied, but considered simply as the bottom of the theomorphic existence of man, God image²⁷.

Heidegger elaborates the finite existence thought in his

24 Ibid., p. 178.

25 Moingt J Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 179.

26 Moingt J Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 181.

27 Ibid., p. 183.

work Being and Time. That existence does not close itself on nothing, but it surpasses itself into a new ontology, a thought of Being as Being, which aims at a beyond the Being itself. To him, man arises in the Being openness and that openness is the Being itself²⁸.

Man Open to God's Call

Several philosophers, openly spiritualists and even Christians, testify the fact that the idea of God survived to the blasts which were given to it by the atheist rationalism and they highlight, in man, a capacity to go beyond, which leads him to the statement of a personal infinite Spirit to what is named God.

The generalized unbelief field of the century had as counterattack to evoke among the French theologians an abundant apologetically literature which seeks to provide faith with proves and rational preambles and because of that it resorted to the perennial philosophy.

Henri de Lubac is the most illustrious example of that classical tendency to whom the problem of God, despite of the new aspects it is in the bottom always the same. To him, the thought about God is invincible because it is consubstantial to the human spirit. The idea of the only God emerges from itself in the conscience interior.

"He affirms: is the God of "classical ontology" dead? It is possible. I occupied myself about it. But it was the rationalists' God. Blow and dissipate this steam. We will not be tormented by that. We will breath more peacefully"²⁹.

The longing for seing God rises human being and in parallel the philosophical effort; but, if it is not there corresponded with a heart and spirit startle, the eland falls and God's presence dissipates.

To Urs von Balthasar, Kierkegaard showed the reciprocity between sin and anguish, establishing therefore a connection between Luther and Heidegger. In view of that the detachment from God, aroused from sin, creates in man an emptiness, origin from his anguish, the Christian revelation can be presented to him in order to clarify the philosophers' analysis.

In Rudolf Bultmann, Heidegger's influence is considerable. He borrows from Heidegger the main themes of the existential analysis: openness, decision, anguish...

28 Heidegger M Carta sobre o Humanismo. São Paulo, Centauro, 2005, p. 93-133.

29 Moingt J Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 191.

“God’s word provokes us to faith, but in such a way that it opens for us the possibility to understand ourselves”³⁰.

Another theologian who retakes Heidegger’s thought is K. Rahner. To him, the anticipation which is transcendental condition of objectification possibility and, in this way, of the position-about-himself of man, it is an anticipation about the unlimited being in itself and contains the implicit statement of existence of an absolute being: the anticipation transcends towards the absolute of God.

In the obscure bottom of existence scrutinized by the new philosophies, the perennial philosophy unveils what it always knew, man’s openness to God, described, mainly, by Henri de Lubac.

Balthasar agrees with Rahner to affirm that man is, as spirit, open to God, before whom he maintains himself, as free listener of the word, in hope of a possible revelation. “He affirms that creature does not have any possibility to consider itself or to understand itself out of God; it is only what it is in the Creator’s arms”³¹.

Henri Bouillard says that from man’s internal conflict it comes the idea of the only necessary, the idea of God. That leads man up to the point in which he must opt for the reception of transcendence or against it. Man only can live if he consents in introducing God in his life. However, God is the one who escapes absolutely man’s apprehensions. We cannot reach only with our efforts our necessary final. Absolutely impossible and absolutely necessary, our destiny is supernatural. All we can do is to wait³².

Philosophy leads to the supernatural idea as the necessary hypothesis. It is only in the acceptance of our supernatural destiny that our knowledge becomes real possession of being. The religious option is the truly solution for the problem of being.

Thereby, it will be a religious philosophy or more precisely Christian which retraces the necessary genesis of the Christian idea of God. Bouillard constructs the project of an apologetics which would have as objective to show that Christianity is the sense revelation of the human existence.

30 Moingt J Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 193.

31 Ibid., p. 198.

32 Ibid., p. 199.

To him, it is necessary to show that in the heart of the atheist humanism it lives an absolute necessity which overflows it, a kind of faith that has the character of a bet not covered. It is in this sense that the Christian faith appears as the necessary condition of the full fulfillment of man. The apologetic demonstration will have at least established that it is not reasonable to refuse the experience of faith.

Conclusion

We can conclude our article with some Moingt’s affirmations which synthesize his reflection about our theme.

“All was said in Kant about God’s existence with regard to the reason; all was said in Hegel about the revelation of God-Trinity in the culture history; all was said, and all remains to be said, in the sense that the affirmation of God remains an option of the reasonable liberty”³³.

“The ‘death of God’ proclaimed by Nietzsche is nothing more than the death of religion, more precisely of Christianity affirmed by Feuerbach and by the most of the young Hegelians”³⁴.

“The rationalist metaphysics does not deplete the seek for the sense and it, even when it does not turn out to place God or to think him how he must be, testifies the longing for the transcendence that habits it”³⁵.

“Several philosophers, openly spiritualists and even Christians, testifies the fact that the idea of God survived to the blasts which were given to it by the atheist rationalism and they highlight, in man, a ‘capacity to go beyond’, which leads him to the statement of a personal infinite Spirit to what is named God”³⁶.

We believe this idea, took from Henri de Lubac, summarizes all our work: “He affirms: is the God of ‘classical ontology’ dead? It is possible. I occupied myself about it. But it was the rationalists’ God. Blow and dissipate this steam. We will not be tormented by that. We will breath more peacefully”³⁷.

33 Moingt J Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 151.

34 Ibid., p. 167.

35 Ibid., p. 183.

36 Moingt J Deus que vem ao homem: do luto à revelação. São Paulo, Loyola, 2010, p. 188.

37 Ibid., p. 191.

