

Sacred and “Archetypal Images”. Religion and New Forms of Spirituality in Postmodern Society

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Abstract

The hypothesis underlying this article is that the social relationship with the sacred in postmodern Western society revolves around (at least) two juxtaposed polarities of the imagery: the Christian religion (especially Catholic), on the one hand, pertains to a “diurnal order” in which the transcendence of God – however weakened – still guarantees and imposes a division between the worldly and the otherworldly; the relationship with the sacred of new forms of spirituality, on the other hand, originates and ends on the immanent level, hence a certain degree of “undifferentiation” that refers to a “nocturnal order” (Durand, 1999). These polarities of the imagery are shaped by different “myths”. The first – the one underlying Christianity – is characterized by a predominant “aerial” symbolism, while the second by an “aquatic” one (new forms of spirituality).

However, in postmodern society, we witness a process of symbolic disarticulation, because the “archetypal images” (Jacobi, 2004, p. 61) reveal themselves as ‘blurred’ to the consciousness. Likewise, this phenomenon produced a *hiatus* between meanings and experience: hence, dialectically, the meanings given to experience are also ‘blurred’. This is due to the collapse of “ambivalence”, which is instead the main feature of the “archetypal images” released by all the *elements* (Bachelard, 2005).

It follows that it is very hard for individuals socialized within these peculiar imageries to live a “full” experience of the sacred: this domain has traditionally ‘contained’ the “dramas” of existence, by revealing its “universal” meaning to the “total consciousness of human being” (Eliade, 2009b, p. 134). Today, it no longer seems to be the case.

This paper aims to scrutinize the above-mentioned social changes through the analytical perspective of depth sociology and sociology of imagery.

Keywords: archetype, imagery, sacred, religion, new forms of spirituality.

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1. Introduction: “Aerial-Diurnal Archetypal Images” (Christianity) and “Aquatic-Nocturnal Archetypal Images” (New Forms of Spirituality)

The social relationship with the sacred in postmodern Western society revolves around (at least) two juxtaposed polarities of the imagery: the Christian religion (especially Catholic), on the one hand, pertains to a “diurnal order” in which the transcendence of God – however weakened – still guarantees and imposes a division between the worldly and the otherworldly; the relationship with the sacred of new forms of spirituality, on the other hand, originates and ends on the immanent level, hence a certain degree of “undifferentiation” that refers to a “nocturnal order”. In a previous work, I applied the aforementioned Durandian categories¹ (Durand, 1999, 2013) to analyze the transformations in the phenomenology of the sacred, reconstructing the socio-historical periods from the pre-axial to the contemporary era (Camorrino, 2022). These polarities of the imagery are shaped by different “myths”². The first – the one underlying Christianity – is characterized by a predominant “aerial” symbolism, while the second by an “aquatic” one.

This is the hypothesis that will be discussed in this article. However, I will not go so far as to assert that these are “pure ideal types”, to use Weberian terms (Weber, 1958): in Christianity, for example, “aquatic-nocturnal archetypal images” are certainly present, just as in the new forms of spirituality, it is plausible to find “aerial-diurnal” ones³, and so on. Moreover, this is perfectly consistent

¹This Durandian taxonomy is very well-known. With “diurnal order” the French anthropologist refers to the “two main diæretic and ascensional schemata, and the archetype of light”; on the other hand, “nocturnal” is that “order” in which the dominant images refer to the “warm, comforting, intimate substance”: the first is the realm of transcendence, the second that of immanence (Durand, 1999, pp. 173, 187, 2013, pp. 219, 236).

² I have no intention of offending anyone’s sensibilities by using these concepts in ways that might appear disrespectful to the believer: they must be understood exclusively as precise scientific tools indispensable for an analysis in accordance with the terminological, methodological, and epistemological presuppositions of the sociology of imagery and depth sociology. Here then “myth” means “the narrative justifying [...based on an archetypal foundation and on an] isotopy of symbols within structural constellations” (Durand, 1999, pp. 342, 343, 2013, pp. 442, 443).

³ More generally, it’s highly risky to maintain that there are ‘monochromatic’ symbolic figurations, so to speak. Nonetheless, it’s certainly possible to outline dominant *elements* that push in the overall direction – despite tensions within the “schemata” – of “symbolic isotopism”. It should be emphasized, however, that archetypes – here I follow both Gaston Bachelard (2024) and Mircea Eliade (2009a) – shape the contents of “cultural complexes” which attract and organize one *element* more than another in

with the unconscious dynamics that underlie the production of “archetypal images” and the formation – to quote Gaston Bachelard – of the related “cultural complexes”: one *element*, rather than another, always aims to colonize the entire imagery. This process, however, will always be hampered by a logic of “paste”: opposing forces will “fight” to recompose the “primitive unity” (which is by its very nature protean) in an attempt – ultimately – to restore the original integration of the cosmic-psychic Totality (Bachelard, 2024, pp. 25-26, 20, 108).

However, in postmodern society, we witness a process of symbolic disarticulation, because the “‘archetypal images’” (Jacobi, 2004, p. 61) reveal themselves as ‘blurred’ to the consciousness. Likewise, this phenomenon produced a *hiatus* between meanings and experience: hence, dialectically, the meanings given to experience are also ‘blurred’. The inescapable “mystery” of existence remains and never ceases to enigmatically demand psychic and eschatological recognition, even though it is today the object of systematic repression. The existential dilemmas at the core of the human condition – which have always been the privileged object of the sacred sphere – remain unexpressed, or are disguised in their own way and digested by the universe of “neotribal” consumption (Maffesoli, 1988), by therapeutics (Rieff, 1972) and by the “infosphere” (Morcellini & Fabris, 2025) through continuous allusions: this state of affairs, originally the result of the passage from the “symbol” to the “sign” (Durand, 1977, pp. 24 and ff.), today overflows into the “simulacral” conversion of reality, ushering in the triumph of the “postmodern” age (Baudrillard, 1976).

2. The Postmodern Sacred: “Disneyfication” as a ‘Halved Symbolism’

Both polarities of the imagery investigated here – due to a process of “symbolic impoverishment” (Durand, 1977, pp. 24 and ff., 2018, pp. 73-75; Eliade, 2009a; Jacobi, 2000, pp. 123-124; Jung, 1977, p. 43) – today do not allow individuals to have an “integral” experience of the sacred domain (Eliade, 2018, pp. 34-36). This is due to the collapse of “ambivalence”, which is instead the main

their imaginal orbit, while never reaching a complete mutual exclusion. These “complexes” nevertheless influence the negative/positive valorization of the correlated *elements*, given the constitutive “ambivalence” of the symbols and their never-ending mutual reference. In this sense, the brief methodological specification above must be taken seriously. Where I affirm that Christianity is founded on “aerial archetypal images” and the new forms of spirituality on “aquatic” ones, I do so not in the vain attempt to outline a “pure ideal type” but rather to highlight a possible “main schemata of images” – to return to Durand’s formulation in the previous footnote.

feature of the “archetypal images” disclosed indiscriminately by all the *elements* (Bachelard, 2005). It follows that it is hard for individuals socialized within these peculiar imageries to live a “full” experience of the sacred. The domain of the sacred has traditionally ‘contained’ the “dramas” of existence, by revealing its “universal” meaning to the “total consciousness of human being” (Eliade, 2009b, p. 134). The related “myths” no longer reveal any “dilemma” due to a symbolic collapse that has radically weakened their significance, resulting from a systematic dismissal of the essential “equivocality” of which they were traditionally *media* (Durand, 2018, pp. 75, 83, 85): and yet, eliminating from aquatic symbolism its fearful side, the “stagnant”, “mephitic”, “swampy” one, that is, the one that metaphorizes death, is no small matter (Bachelard, 2024); just as eliminating from the aerial symbolism the aspects linked to “heaviness” and therefore to “falling” is anything but insignificant (Bachelard, 2022). As a sociologist of religion, I would say that, in both cases, these ‘halved’ imaginal figurations raise relevant questions concerning the problem of “theodicy” (Weber, 1976, 1980; Berger, 1984; Camorrino, 2024b), which have much to do with their different position on the transcendence-immanence *continuum* (Camorrino, 2025b).

The ‘archetypal stimulus’ cannot be the object of a coherent “mythical” systematization where the corresponding symbolism is not able to express the ineluctable presence in the world of offense (moral and physical), injustice, and suffering as elementary ‘frictions’ of the human condition (which is first and foremost an admission of the transience of life): the mystery that emanates from this state of affairs – which cannot be suppressed on an unconscious level – will remain a “confused and mute experience” which will ultimately deprive the individuals of any “intelligibility” of evil, as a result of the postmodern impossibility of “integrating *ethos* and *kosmos* in an encompassing vision”⁴ (Ricoeur, 1993, pp. 14, 18). When consciousness becomes deaf to the symbol, any access to a “meaningful whole” becomes impracticable, according to Károly Kerényi. Socialization processes no longer provide moral maps useful for giving meaning to existence, thanks to “examples” capable of “being explanatory” around the *deep* reasons for our being-here: the “myth” can sustain individuals towards significant goals only when it fully refers to the “archetypal images”, since it is not in the ‘universe of causes’ that it is possible to find the ultimate answers to the fundamental problems of existence. Only the “myth” is able to “distort” human reality to the point that it “gives a ground, lays a foundation” (Jung & Kerényi, 1964, pp. 17, 18, 20, 1949, pp. 5, 6, 8).

I do not want – and it is worth clarifying – to make any appeal aimed at recovering a mythical organization of social life: I am aware of the slippery slope

⁴ My translation from Italian.

to which this anachronistic (and dangerous!) claim would physiologically lead. More precisely, following the Jungian lesson, I affirm the opposite: postmodern biographical trajectories, given the unavailability of intrapsychic contents aimed at symbolic integration, are increasingly exposed to the concrete risk of being overwhelmed by the insidious action of unconscious forces. The unconscious – according to Jolande Jacobi – “exerts a power of compensation”. The fulfillment of the “totality of the psyche” where it is not achieved through a correct internal balance, causes the unconscious to ‘sequester’ the Ego by virtue of ‘archetypal assault’ which – like a hydraulic system – fill the gaps by pouring in archaic contents that dominate the individual’s will: the impracticability of an adequate “synthesis” between the conscious and unconscious levels – that is, the failure to achieve a psychic “roundness” – fertilizes the ground for “conflicts” and encourages an improper “adaptation to reality” (Jacobi, 2000, pp. 23, 29, 35-38, 1980, pp. 10, 16). Bringing images to consciousness – as Gilbert Durand teaches – even the most terrifying ones, allows ‘archetypal stimuli’, through symbolization, to manifest themselves in forms that are far less alarming and harmful than if they were instead left ‘lurking’ in the most remote areas of the Self. Latent in the unconscious, they continually threaten to attack the Self with a power multiplied by an Ego made very vulnerable by systematic repression: representing “darkness” to the conscience instead means already granting oneself, psychically, the possibility of opposing it with “light”. The (illusory) suppression of one side (the ‘dark’ one) of the “archetypal images” is therefore the greatest risk for the individual. The boomerang effect of this vain defensive strategy is such that even the painful recognition of the most disturbing aspects of the archetypes is very little in comparison: by means of symbolic intercession, even the greatest “anguish” gradually becomes “manageable” once, “thanks to the authority of the *cogito*”⁵, it has been translated into an image (Durand, 2013, p. 145, 1999, p. 119).

This tendency towards repression appears to be a typical outcome of post-modern socialization, which favors “infantilized”, magical, narcissistic⁶ attitudes with respect to the sacred domain (Camorrino, 2024a) and not only towards it (Camorrino, 2025a). This trend is the fallout from the radicalization of a process – as said by Michel Maffesoli – begun in modernity, which nullifies the fruitful

⁵ I preferred to translate this quote from the Italian version of Durand’s book. The English version lacks the concept of “authority”, which I consider theoretically very significant.

⁶ The main reference for the analysis of the “culture of narcissism” is the classic book by Christopher Lasch (1999).

work of the “*coincidentia oppositorum*”⁷ in favor of a sterile “rationalism”. A significant *caveat*: beware of trivializations and falling victim to inappropriate conceptual overlaps: “rationalism”, I said! “Rationality”, on the contrary, must be safeguarded at all costs! The excess of such rationalism disables meaningful relationships between “the four elements of heaven and earth, [and between] the living and the dead”⁸ (Maffesoli, 2021, p. 23).

I hypothesize that the two social relationships with the sacred domain analyzed here, the Christian religion and new forms of spirituality (the first characterized by an ‘aerial’ symbolism, the second by an ‘aquatic’ one), show the “disneyfication”⁹ of the related “archetypal images”. If carefully sociologically scrutinized, “disneyfication” reveals the *cultural interdiction* that prevents the processes of symbolization aimed, ultimately, at reaching the emotionally internalized cognition of finitude: the fading of the “*tremendum*” facet of reality, of which the sacred ‘Elsewhere’ has been the unquestionable bearer for millennia, favors the (illusory) dominion of only the “*fascinans*” reverse of being-in-the-world¹⁰ (Otto, 2009). This basic fact indicates the almost impracticable acceptance for postmodern individuals of the “shadow” (Jung, 2023) *par excellence*: precisely, death.

⁷ The theoretical tool of “*coincidentia oppositorum*” is key to the epistemology underlying depth sociology and sociology of imagery. These analytical perspectives are applied sharply and originally to the study of media products in a book by Roberta Bartoletti (2023). In this article, I owe a debt to her work.

⁸ My translation from Italian.

⁹ I borrow this term from David Lyon, who uses it to describe the religious phenomenon within the postmodern context. Postmodernity – in his opinion – is the result of the confluence between the acceleration/omni-pervasiveness of new communication technologies and the unbridled expansion of consumerist logic: this combination generates “nostalgic”, “playful”, and “depthless” visions of reality (Lyon, 2002, p. 21; 2000, p. 6). However, I draw the strongest meaning of the concept from a pioneering work by Edgar Morin (1970, p. 530). The French scholar defines “*disneyien*” as the tension in the imagery that emerges from the countercultural movements of the second half of the last century: it’s a “childish” attitude toward the world. The harshness and indifferent cruelty of existence – represented by “archetypal images” of primordial, aggressive, and untamable animals – is transfigured, precisely through the enchantment of Disney’s theriomorphic imagery, into a cosmos of boundless love where even the most ferocious of animals transforms into the most tender and trustworthy of friends.

¹⁰ I use this very well-known and useful formulation, but not in a strictly Heideggerian sense.

3. Christianity: Transcendence and the “Aerial” Symbolism

The ‘Totality of the ‘aerial’ image is guaranteed – according to Gaston Bachelard – as long as the “ascension” retains its moral valorization as an elevation from the “abyss”: that is, it is a primary “vital impulse” through which “the human being becomes aware of his entire destiny”¹¹. In the Christian ‘myth’ the ‘abyss’ is the *maelstrom* in which the sinner is swallowed up but from which he can nevertheless always be rescued thanks to the “ascensional” power of redemption: it is this “*coniunctio* of opposites” that allows us to preserve the “dialectic of lightness and heaviness”, that is, the vitalizing force of the ‘aerial’ “archetypal images” integrated with its “opposite” (Bachelard, 2022, pp. 48, 49, 8). I anticipate a question that I will explore in more detail shortly: when, as nowadays, belief in original sin (and in sin *tout court*...) vanishes – that is to say: one is almost always a victim and never guilty – how can the symbol unleash its “*redemptive* effect”? (Jung & Kerényi, 1964, p. 132, 1949, p. 121)?

The “fall” is a “primary image”¹² since it is intuitively associated with “darkness”, that is, with that gloom to which the unstoppable deterioration condemns everyone, because of temporality. *Ergo* – in agreement with Durand – “catamorphic symbols” are a disguised metaphor for death: based on these imaginal concatenations triggered by an emotional kernel, the “fall” is unconsciously experienced as the effect of a “punishment”. Underlying Christianity’s positions against the “flesh”, we find the same archetypal echoes. The flesh, becoming the vessel of sin, is *eo ipso* negatively valorized as the main vehicle of the “fall”: the temptations of the flesh transfigure the “belly [...in an euphemized¹³] microcosm of the abyss” whose whirling grasp can only be countered by means of the symbolic countermove of “abstinence and chastity”. “Primary images” prompted by the destructive forces of death are therefore automatically associated with the body. In the “aerial-diurnal” symbolism of Christianity, the body/flesh is consequently an “object” to be “heroically” dominated so that the “anguish” it releases as a temporal marker of organic decay can be effectively

¹¹ My translation from Italian.

¹² The concept of “primary images” is central to Gaston Bachelard’s thought. Throughout this essay, I owe a significant debt to this unique author, who inspired several of Gilbert Durand’s theses. The work of Carl Gustav Jung remains the main reference on the theme of the archetype in the strictest sense of depth psychology. However, I have developed the reflection here from a sociological perspective, also drawing on, among other scholars, the studies by Mircea Eliade.

¹³ The quote is taken from the English version of Durand’s book, which, however, omits the important concept in square brackets. We find it, on the contrary, in the Italian translation. Given its particular importance, I have integrated the quote here.

emotionally counteracted (Durand, 2013, pp. 129-131, 137, 138, 140-141, 1999, p. 116).

The Christian religion, drawing its symbolic power from “aerial” archetypes, necessarily degrades the body: the transcendence of God, through imaginal juxtaposition, forces the body into “heaviness,” a “cage” that prevents “leaps” toward the otherworldly. Belief in the soul – crucial for Christians – draws its meaning from “*reveries*” of “dematerialization”, which allow individuals to imagine reuniting with their loved ones by ascending to the celestial sphere (Bachelard, 2022, p. 173). The ‘medium’ that links man to God is the quintessence of the “aerial” archetype, so much so that the soul has been happily defined as the “word of breath” (Bachelard, 1975, p. 10) or – more modestly by myself – “a clear dance of air and light” whose stage is the sky of eternity (Camorino & Pannofino, 2024, p. 25). It is no coincidence that the attribute of brightness, together with the aerial one, complements the “diurnal order of the image”: if the “ascension” is opposed to the Fall, the light stands out against the “darkness” (Durand, 1999, 2013). The afterlife – the ‘Elsewhere’ *par excellence* for the Christian – is radically “diurnal”, firstly because it is a place ontologically distinct from the world, and secondly because the saved can finally enjoy the immeasurable fullness of divine light: Paradise, a place of unique “verticality”, is automatically associated with the most powerful “ascensional” images. This symbolically gratifies the most unconscious drive toward the “transcendence of being” (Bachelard, 1996, p. 57). Light and air are the “primary images” and, therefore, the profound values of the transcendence of the Christian God: this God cannot – following Durand – be anything other than Father and Person if He wants to preserve His “diurnal” realm made of symbolic constellations that are aerial, radiant, and separate from the world. The “diæretic” relationship established by the unbridgeable distance between human being and God is its imaginal and ontological foundation. Divine omnipotence, compared to the misery of the creature and the corruption of the world, can only dwell in the Heaven of transcendence: that is, on another “mode of being” (Eliade, 1987, 2009b). In Christianity, the omnipotent and celestial transcendence of God is archetypally associated with a “sovereign” figure, whose “sceptre” – on whose “ascensional” and phallic symbolism it is superfluous to insist – reinforces its masculine/monarchical character (Durand, 2013, pp. 164-165). Just as, conversely, the homeland of “darkness”, whose undisputed emperor is the devil, works as an imaginal counterpart to the divine (Cipriani, 2022): however, the figure of Lucifer justifies the presence of evil in the world despite the omnipotence of the Lord – again, the “reconciliation of opposites” guarantees the ‘symbolic fullness’ and the Totality of the “archetypal image” (Eliade, 1995, pp. 79-80).

In any case, what Max Weber (1976, 1980) states is also in this case precious: Christianity/Catholicism has never completely freed the world from the invisible and from magic. Just think of the multitude of Saints and intermediary figures between the otherworldly and the Earth. There has never been in Christianity/Catholicism – translating Weberian grammar into an imaginal perspective – a complete “distinction” between “modes of Being” nor, therefore, between different “Orders”: although there is a prevalence of “diurnal” traits, Christianity/Catholicism has retained recognizable “nocturnal” contents¹⁴. Only Protestantism will ‘diurnalize’ in a rigorous way, so to speak, the relationship with God, also fostering, in a completely unintentional way, not just the “disenchantment of the world” but also the rise of capitalism (Weber, 2006b). “Iconoclastic” and “diurnal” modernity are first and foremost the outcome of Protestantism *before* the Cartesian turn (Durand, 1977). This aspect was initially noted by Jung himself (1977, pp. 27-29), who pointed out the remarkable role Protestantism played in the “symbolic impoverishment” of modern social life.

4. Postmodern Christianity: The Fading of Archetypal “Numinosity” and “Simulacral” Risks

The “aerial-diurnal” imagery of Christianity, for almost two millennia, had a ‘symbolic fullness’ that effectively ‘contained’ the ambivalence of the “archetypal images”, thus avoiding “negative inflations” of one aspect of the archetype to the detriment of the other (Jung & Kerényi, 1964, p. 147). This is a function that the Church has fulfilled successfully for centuries (Jung, 1977, p. 41).

It is, ultimately, on the ‘creatural abyss’¹⁵ (Eliade, 1959, p. 110) – paradoxical as it may seem, but “paradox” is the very essence of the sacred (Eliade, 2009a) – that the ‘aerial’ archetypology of Christianity is founded: it is this side-real distance from the Most High that makes “*faith*” possible in the Judeo-Christian sense, breaking with the idea of archaic immanence and opening up to the vision of life as a “*gift* from the Lord and not [as] the product of a direct a material conception [...resulting from] the circulation of sacred energy in the cosmos” (Eliade, 1959, p. 110, 1975, pp. 116, 115). It is this original rift that incessantly fuels the “tension” between the worldly of the creature and the otherworldly of the Creator, increasing a filial “dependence”, a powerful force of “attraction” that calls the faithful towards transcendence (Parotto & Lodovici,

¹⁴ For reasons of space, I can’t analyze here some of the highly relevant “nocturnal-aquatic-feminine archetypal images” present in Christianity.

¹⁵ In my opinion, this is one of the conceptual *nuclei* of Eric Voegelin’s (1987) masterful reflections on the “order of history” and its symbols.

2022, pp. 7, 13). The “numinosity”¹⁶ of the “aerial archetypal image” underlying Christianity is therefore provided by the Totality of the corresponding symbolic constellation based on a constitutive “*coincidentia oppositorum*”: salvation-ascension/light VS damnation-Fall/darkness. The “*redemptive* effect” it is therefore guaranteed by the soteriological drama of which this symbolic constellation becomes the medium in the believer’s consciousness. This symbolic work of mediation ‘contains’ the affectivity arising from the unfathomable mystery of faith: the ‘myth’ of the Christian ‘archetypal image’ draws its depth significance from the surplus of meaning that emanates from the imaginal union of the Abyss and Heaven. The integrative function of the “aerial archetypal image” is therefore ensured by the dilemmatic condition of which it is the vehicle. A “*vital necessity*” (Jung, 2014, p. 1442) for the entire individual psyche to the point of steering behavior, influencing the relationship with the alter and ‘filling’, by intensifying it, the meaning of death. Instead, as I anticipated, in the postmodern era, the religious landscape becomes “disneyfied”. Once the “union of opposites” (Jung 2014) is compromised, the “aerial” archetype finds itself stripped of its “shadow” side, as a result of a cultural ‘castration’: this imaginal imbalance results from the preeminence of the “*fascinans*” side. This state of affairs prevents Catholicism from drawing on the power that emanates from the “equivocality” of the sacred: symbols are thus degraded to the rank of signs (and *beyond*, as we will see very shortly). What “redemptive effect” can be unleashed from a symbolism that refers exclusively to the ascension without threatening the Fall? If belief in sin (not to mention original sin...) seems to most people as an unacceptable dogma, what “numinosity” could the “archetypal image” of the Abyss ultimately have? It is no coincidence that fewer and fewer believers state that they believe in the afterlife; when they do, they believe in Heaven, but not in Hell (Garelli, 2020, 2021): however, the promise of eternal light, in the absence of the symbolic integration ensured by darkness, loses its emotional charge, producing not only a certain indifference, but perhaps even boredom.

Another case worthy of interest: the symbolism of the cross played a decisive role in the logic of the “reconciliation of opposites”, since it, already in archaic myths, represented, at the same time, the “Tree of Life”: meanings given to death are thus compensated by images of rebirth (Jung, 2014, pp. 1747, 1763-1764). Today, however, the Cross has lost, in the eyes of most Catholics, any “plurivocality” due to a strong weakening of its archetypal energy and dissipating almost every vestige of “numinosity”: it becomes a “*crucifix*” (Durand, 2018, p. 75), an *object* that only rarely triggers an immediate association with the Pas-

¹⁶ On the crucial “numinous” connotation of the archetype (Jung, 2015), see also Secondulfo (2026).

sion of Christ and His subsequent Resurrection. The automatic chain of signification established for millennia between the “‘symbolizer’ and the symbolized complex” (Grassi, 2015, p. 207) is broken; we are thus witnessing a strong emotional disinvestment towards the Cross, not only on the part of non-believers.

What does all this tell us? That “disneyfication” has first and foremost impoverished every *living* symbolic reference to death, since the entire world subsumes the “infantilized” *ethos* of Disneyland, a ‘synecdoche-place’ of postmodern society, that is, where temporality “collapses” and, *ergo*, finitude is banished in the name of a “simulacral” valorization of an existence that is actually “frozen” (Baudrillard, 2014): have Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck ever aged since their ‘birth’?

It should not be surprising then if, to ‘unfreeze’ religious sentiment, the Church relies on big “charismatic” events, whose “effervescence” provokes an *increase in the temperature of the social body* typical of mystical/communitarian fusions (Maffesoli, 2021, p. 45). At the same time, however, it is very symptomatic to underline the failure of these strategies implemented (in vain) by the Catholic Church with the aim of producing a growing participation in rituals (Diotallevi, 2023, p. 70 n. 9). This is not surprising since “spectacularization” does not revive the mystery of faith, but rather causes its withering due to the primacy of the *hic et nunc*: inevitably, this detaches the ritual from any ‘symbolic depth’, undermining both its authority and the truth of which it was traditionally the medium. The ‘archetypal blurring’ goes hand in hand with a symbolic weakening. In our case, this is documented – in agreement with Luigi Berzano – by the changed relationship with rituals, which is followed, precisely, by a “festive Christianity” in which “aesthetics” cannibalizes meaning through the hegemony of a *communication-for-communication* caused by the absence of a shared and internalized symbolic referent (Berzano, 2023, pp. 11-12). The Catholic “rites of passage” (baptisms, weddings, funerals, etc.), the only ones that still have high rates of participation, retain the power of ‘world-making’, but not based on a real symbolic trigger: the rite refers to itself to the extent that it reveals a worldly “playful” dimension, not an opening onto the ‘Elsewhere’. Rituals produce “emotion” but do not refer to the dilemmatic “truths” that show and strengthen the mystery of faith: people seek the “wonder” of a God always ready to forgive and welcome with mercy (Berzano, 2024, pp. 29-38), but never the trepidation that the gaze upon the Abyss brings with it. The “aerial” archetype, deprived of its terrible side, undermines the symbol’s “redemptive” power. At the same time, are inhibited the symbol’s mediating functions with the ‘Elsewhere’. With the fading of “numinosity”, it is not only the symbol that loses its significance, but the ‘Elsewhere’ itself. This means that there is a regime – reasoning from some of Mario Perniola’s insights – where the “devotional” dimension refers only to itself, without establishing links to any “model”. What matters is *only* the

emotion unleashed by the moment: disembedded from the ‘Elsewhere’, the symbol, which in modernity has become a sign, now degrades into a “simulacrum”. Ritual reveals its inadequacy in evoking an ‘Otherness’ capable of “doubling” the world *ab origine* and legitimizing its existence as a Creation ontologically different from those who inhabit it. It is therefore impossible to integrate the meanings of the gift/drama of being-here into a ‘symbolically full’ eschatological perspective by virtue of which, through a game of opposites, the “reconciliation” of good and evil would ultimately be experienced as the *realissimum* of existence in the light of a soteriological compensation. The ritual, no “longer socializing [individuals] to the truth”, flattens its functions on the horizontal replication of copies devoid of referent ‘Others’ from which to draw the mystery of its own power (Perniola, 1980, pp. 19, 35, 42). The sacred domain of Christianity/Catholicism is thus deprived of collectively internalized “paradigmatic models” to which the faithful can refer their life, to say it with Mircea Eliade. Once the power of its symbolic constellation has been weakened, also the “numinosity” of the “aerial archetypal image” no longer works. In this way, Christianity/Catholicism loses its function of promising in the *postmortem* the attainment of a renewed Totality: this scenario relieved, for almost two millennia, the anguish of a senseless life/death (Eliade, 1987, 2009a).

As I anticipated, however, this social eclipse of the “shadow” is merely illusory. The pressure exerted by the ‘archetypal stimuli’ is channeled elsewhere, but no longer into the Christian Elsewhere. This is not without consequences. The media industry has recognized the need for meaning linked to the representation of death and the mystery it brings, as evidenced by the success of horror films, video games, series, etc.: media production is thus replacing the Church in the non-secondary function of “instilling fear” in individuals (Flanagan, 2007, p. 8). The universe of cultural consumption, however, fails to *reconcile* consciousness regarding the ‘ultimate questions’. While it enables forms of “projection-identification” with respect to the transmitted contents (Morin, 2005, 2016), it also fails to fully activate the related “archetypal images” (Bartolletti, 2023, 2026). The (illusory) mutilation of archetypes coincides – in the terms of the sociology of religion – with the disabling of “theodicy”: the “shadow” is repressed, and so is its associated vitalizing function, namely, the power to counter, thanks to the ‘game of opposites’, the anxiety unleashed by the presence of evil, injustice, and death. Due to the above-mentioned mutilation of archetypes, a meaningful integration is today very hard. If this hypothesis is correct, how can we hope, once and for all, for a “just equalization” that counterbalances worldly inequalities and inequities (Weber, 1980, p. 211)?

Nonetheless, Christianity retains, albeit in a residual form, an archetypal relationship with “aerial” symbolism. This relationship, though “disneyfied”,

still secures (relatively) God’s transcendence. A definitive ‘simulacral drift’ of His sacred dominion, which remains within the “diurnal order”, is thus averted.

5. The *Aquatic Cosmos* of New Forms of Spirituality: New Age, Energy, the Depths of the Self

The New Age, at least initially, founds its imagery on prospects of radical social transformation (which, however, must be perfected starting from the inner Self), which will be accomplished in the “Age of *Aquarius*”: the reference to this Era of health, peace, and serenity clearly draws on “baptismal” symbols, understood as a ritual moment of purification. Significantly, groups that share this peculiar sensibility have been defined as “Aquarian communities” (Berzano 1999a, pp. 8, 27, 46 and ff.). In any case, the “Age of Aquarius”, especially in the initial phase of the 1960s, promised the realization of countercultural visions axiologically close to those promoted by the so-called ‘hippies’, that is, to detach oneself from the “attachments” that capitalist society, through its ubiquitous consumerist temptations, inflicted on people (Heelas, 1993, p. 104). It is precisely with the “Age of *Aquarius*” – whose connection with ‘aquatic’ symbolism seems quite clear... – that the concept of “‘spiritual energy’” begins to spread, which propagates in “flows” (Albanese, 2007, pp. 498, 499).

In the imaginal lineage shared by New Age and new forms of spirituality¹⁷, a crucial role is played by “energy” (Secondulfo, 2009a): the centrality of this *substance* is another reason that encourages an ‘aquatic’ reading of this social relationship with the sacred domain. The particularly ‘slippery’ conceptual nature of this *substance*, given how protean it appears in its possible representations and definitions, could legitimately leave the reader dissatisfied with this kind of ‘imaginal classification’. However, Gaston Bachelard (2024, p. 97) highlights how the “material imagination” traces all fluid *substances* back to water, and energy is no exception to this rule. Energy is first and foremost a “flow” that pervades everything and whose correct ‘course’ guarantees harmony, tranquility, and health not only to the Self but to the entire cosmos, since the one and the other are inseparable entities: one of the most emblematic New Age adages is “‘going with the flow’”, a solicitation, that is, to follow the circle of energy and to foster it with the right attitude (Albanese, 1999, p. 321). Matter, incessantly crossed by energy, becomes indistinguishable from it and,

¹⁷ For reasons of space, I cannot delve into what is meant in the sociological literature by ‘new forms of spirituality’. See Giordan (2016); Heelas & Woodhead et al. (2005); Palmisano & Pannofino (2021).

ultimately, by interpenetrating and dissolving into each other, gives shape to a monistic universe (Albanese, 1993, p. 135): moreover, experimental science – starting from the beginning of the twentieth century – reinforces these beliefs, which here, however, are translated in a “metaphysical” sense since, even if it is written as ‘energy’, it is read as ‘spirit’ (Albanese, 2007, p. 398). In short: matter is “concentrated energy in perpetual vibration”¹⁸ (Berzano, 1999a, p. 63).

Such a cosmos *waters down* all the entities that inhabit it, producing an undifferentiated ‘One’: the archetypal ‘nucleus’ that refers to the primary force of “energy” unconsciously works the imagination symbolically relating the *substance* of this cosmos to the ‘aquatic’¹⁹ *element*: the entire world, and the entities that dwell within it, none excluded, constitute nothing more than a complex system of communicating vessels that exchange flows of energy. It is therefore necessary to manage this ‘flow’ as best as possible through focused, repeated, and daily practices since nothing escapes this fundamental *Heraclitean* principle: diet, physical activity, meditation, relational activity, everything contributes – as a multiplying or demultiplying valorization of the continuous ‘outpour’ of this invisible *substance* – in a more or less positive way to the well-being/illness of the person (Secondulfo, 2009b, p. 13). It is – as Domenico Secondulfo recalls (2009a, p. 141) – a “world [...] immersed in a sea of energetic vibrations [characterised by] an uninterrupted flow of energy”²⁰, which unfolds itself on a plane of radical immanence: we are dealing with a horizontal ‘current’ that goes forward in a perpetual circularity without ever falling into “ascensional” dynamics. This universe – this is my hypothesis – imposes itself on the psyche like an *aquatic cosmos*. Energy is – at the level of “primary images” – an elementary force from the ‘here below’: even when it expands into sidereal space, it does not attain any transcendence.

Energy is therefore the *medium par excellence* that promises the reconquest of Totality, the “nocturnal” countermove to the intolerable – for these people – “diurnal” fragmentation produced by modernity and its reductionist and divisive logic. It is necessary to have the right amount of “awareness” to enter the regenerating circle of energy positively. So much so that – to use a judicial motto – ‘energy does not tolerate ignorance’: in this *aquatic cosmos*, it is energy itself that lays down the law. It is certainly possible to ‘not know’, but this will

¹⁸ My translation from Italian.

¹⁹ It is interesting that Pier Luca Marzo (2006, p. 135) argues, for his part, that the digital universe, at an imaginal level, is the reflection of an “aquatic metamorphosis”. I have elsewhere (Camorino, 2024c) illustrated an imaginal analogy between the digital cosmos and new forms of spirituality, in the sense of a shared state of “undifferentiation” and “re-enchantment”.

²⁰ My translation from Italian.

inevitably weigh on the lives of individuals. Diseases, for example, are nothing other than the faithful mirror of an inadequate knowledge of the Self, where the latter (mind-body) is the main channel of communication with the cosmos (Filoramo, 1995). In this hymn to “undifferentiation”, the postmodern individual does not, however, cultivate any intention of abandoning the Self, but rather wants to “‘save’ ” it in every way (Filoramo, 1996). The concept of “energy” therefore lends itself particularly effectively to reformulating – as Giovanni Filoramo states – the principles of ancient Gnostic doctrines in the grammar of postmodern spirituality: the eschatological dimension – which no longer includes any otherworldly scenarios, mostly limiting itself to promises of “well-being” and “self-realization” – opens up soteriological opportunities that emanate only from the Self. For this purpose, each individual must tune into their deepest inner reality. As the seat of an ‘ontologically good’ nature, it demands – for “self-salvation”²¹ – acts of awareness and not pleas for forgiveness addressed to the will of God (Filoramo, 1999).

This invitation to carry out an incessant *speleological training* in the ‘depth of the Self’, understood as the constitutive *nucleus* of the spiritual essence, equally reveals ‘aquatic’ echoes: depth is not an exclusive feature of this *element*, since the earth too – as Bachelard reminds us – has “its crevasses and faults”. Nonetheless, these have “their own ‘geometry’ ” that ultimately makes them “measurable”. This “measurability” instantly reduces – on an imaginal level – their “abysmal” value. The depth of water, on the other hand, escapes any possibility of mathematization, “immediately [evoking] the image of the unfathomable”²² (Bachelard, 2005, p. 35). It is the ‘aquatic’ archetype, *ergo*, the one that rules over the symbolism of depth.

There is a further inextricable relationship that pertains to the imaginal valorizations, and that confirms the structural associations between the “nocturnal-aquatic-maternal” figurations: the ‘aquatic’ archetypes are connected to the feminine ones (also) because they share, precisely, the attribute of ‘depth’ which is, first of all, a compelling symbolic quality related to the maternal womb (Grassi, 2021, p. 571; Di Nicola, 2024). We know that “symbolic isotopism” responds to the logic of “constellations” organized by archetypes whose aggregating force holds together precise “schemata” of images (Durand, 1999; 2013): it follows that an ‘aquatic’ and “nocturnal” figuration cannot but be maternal (Jung, 2014, p. 1719). Bachelard (2008, p. 25), very inspired, asserts:

²¹ The question of “self-salvation” is one of the main issues addressed by Eric Voegelin (1987) in his work.

²² My translation from Italian.

“the night that *encases* us is an ocean of sleeping waters”²³. But if the quality of “ordering” belongs to the symbolism of the Father, the one of “*encasing*” is the archetypal property of the Mother, both “sovereigns” in the psycho-cosmic dimension (Morin, 2002b, p. 201): it is very relevant to understand the scope of these properties. These, projecting themselves onto scales of Totality, put the Masculine and the Feminine in a position of perfect equality, both hierarchical and symbolic (Neumann, 1981). Analogically, nothing “encases” more than a maternal womb, the first ‘liquid house’ in which the fetus floats: the supreme moment of ‘undifferentiation’, of “uterine bliss” in which no split has occurred between the Ego and non-Ego (Freud, 1975). The cradle first and “the house of our birth” then, preserve the “oneiric power” of the experience before coming into the world, for which archetypically every house is valued in a maternal sense (Bachelard, 1975, p. 35; 2011). From this point of view, the cosmos is Mother, just as the Mother is cosmos: “anthropomorphism” and “cosmomorphism” find in the maternal archetype a principle of identity (Morin, 2002a, p. 130).

We must look carefully at this stage of the intrapsychic process because – as Christopher Lasch reminds us – it is today undergoing a large social spread due to recent and significant social changes: the ubiquitous socialization agencies of a “therapeutic” nature, the omnivorous expansion of the sphere of consumption, the transformations of the family (especially of the parental figure), of politics, of school, of work, of sport, of the relationship between genders, have contributed in recent decades to the spread of a “culture of narcissism” by virtue of which for noteworthy portions of the population the condition of ‘undifferentiation’ typical of the newborn and the infant (if not that of the fetus) has stabilized in adulthood. This produces the perfect imaginal *humus* for the propagation and affirmation of “fusional” relationships with the world. It is worth emphasizing that the narcissist, at the same time, ardently desires emancipation from all constraints: that is, he yearns for the most complete self-sufficiency (Lasch, 1999). The *alter*, being of interest only as a mirror of the “ideal” Self (Lowen, 1992), never becomes – in the eyes of the narcissist – a worthy subject of any reciprocity (Cesareo & Vaccarini, 2012). This is a relational dead end. Eager to live Total experiences again and again (Sennett, 2002), he cannot tolerate any bond that undermines the *grandeur* of his aspirations: who could ever prove capable of such perfection?

Archetypically, the “sovereign gods” – among whom we certainly include the Christian God – are represented as “binding deities” due to their

²³ My translation from Italian. I use the term “encase” in place of the Italian verb “avvolgere” given the importance Bachelard himself attaches to the term. The latter is taken from the English translation (2011, p. 107). Emphasis added.

omnipotence: they establish a relationship of inextricable dependence with their devotees (Eliade, 2018, pp. 85 and ff.). This is psychologically intolerable for the narcissist: he flatly refuses the possibility of understanding himself as a ‘debtor’ towards any alter/Alterity²⁴. Once he has denied every constraint that castrates his drives of *grandeur*, the narcissist, by necessity, doesn’t accept any submission to authorities external to the Self. So, he removes from his horizon of meaning not only God, but also the “figure of the father” as the *symbol-of-you-cannot*²⁵. The narcissist wants to experience *now-and-always* the bottomless fusion of the maternal womb and never consent to the separation inflicted by the father’s prohibition: the all-embracing cosmos of the narcissist is governed by goddesses because a God-Father-Sovereign-Binder would be unbearable for him on a psychic level. On the other hand, this is confirmed by the growing process of “feminization”, which, more generally, is affecting Western society and which, first of all, is spreading in opposition to the concept and tradition of the Heavenly Father (Maffesoli, 2013). A “mother goddess” who embodies feminine values that are antithetical to the “moral law” of Christian tradition is widely preferred (Berzano, 1999a, p. 94).

The narcissist, by removing the figure of the alter/Alterity, internalizes the idea of omnipotence: the entire world (the non-Ego), perceived as his psychic extension – according to the Freudian and then Lacanian lesson – is automatically (in his eyes) at the service of the gratification of his desires. Because of the refusal of any obligation towards Alterity (Otherness) – that is, having denied the ontological *debt* towards a Creator-God who gave humans life as a gift (the consequence of this ‘first denial’ opens up to modernity) and subsequently having denied any debt towards any *alter tout court* (the consequence of this ‘second denial’ opens up to postmodernity) – the narcissist

²⁴ The transformations of the relationship with Alterity (Otherness) scrutinized in the light of the category of “debt” have been the subject of the masterful studies by Pierre Clastres (1984, 2013) and Marcel Gauchet (1992, 2005). The thesis discussed in Camorrino (2024a) reconstructs exactly this process. The changes in the social relationship with the sacred domain – investigated over a long period – show the extinction of the Moderns’ “debt” towards God, up to a peculiar widespread postmodern belief: each individual not only no longer has any debt, but has the right to claim an unlimited credit towards (not only the sacred sphere) but towards society *tout court*: this state of affairs is the outcome of the historical-social trajectory that goes “from God to the Self”.

²⁵ Here, I apply a Lacanian insight. Jacques Lacan, analyzing the contemporary transformations of the “Names-of-the-Father” (Lacan & Mehlman, 1987), provides a clarifying formulation that highlights the current “social decline of the paternal imago” (as cited in Ehrenberg, 2010, p. 159).

claims *unlimited credit* for the mere fact of *being-in-the-world*²⁶. Any potential obstacle to this omnipotent grip on the world is experienced as an insupportable hindrance. Even a Goddess – archetype of the feminine –, although much preferable to the traditional ‘male’ God, can be, at most, an obstacle to such omnipotent drives: if She is accepted, however She will impose Herself on the consciousness only in Her “disneyfied” version, that is, purified of Her terrible traits²⁷ (Neumann, 1981): She must exclusively care for, console, and satisfy; Her excessive embrace can never strangle; nourishment, incessantly provided, can never choke; a moment of absence can never turn into abandonment (Bartoletti, 2023; 2026). “Energy” is a feminine and “maternal” substance (Berzano, 1999a, p. 91). Nevertheless, it is at the same time *impersonal* and devoid of any agency other than that impressed by the one who becomes its “cup”, if not “‘vessel’”, to use the words of both Durand (2013) and Weber (2006a, p. 47): it is, in short, the ideal *cup of tea* for postmodern spirituality, which – as you will have understood by now – I consider the form of the sacred most suitable for the narcissistic *ethos*.

Another relevant indicator of this peculiar social relationship with the sacred is the way in which the body is lived. For postmodern spirituality, the body is the most significant pivot of experience. This marks a radical reversal of the Christian imagery (Giordan, 2009): sensual source of direct experience of the sacred, the body (mind-body) is the main validating source of a *truthful* relationship with the sacred domain (Berzano, 1999a, p. 21). If the symbolic Christian relationship with original sin is broken, an “optimistic” vision of human nature automatically spreads. This is due to an antinomic logic. That is, an overturning occurs: once the flesh-sin image is invalidated, not only the body as such, but also sexuality becomes an important “‘spiritual vehicle’” (Berzano, 1999a, p. 85; 1999b, p. 6). It is important to point out that, if the significant

²⁶ On the topic of “unlimited credit” as sign of our time, see also Bruckner (2000). Anyway, the existential/symbolic/metaphysical shift from debt to credit also reflects the collapse of the figure of the Protestant bourgeois in favor of the postmodern consumer: the former bases his life on the *ethos* of saving, the latter on the *ethos* of ‘I spend today, tomorrow, if I can, I’ll pay’ – the logic, that is, of the *credit* card and all possible forms of payment deferral, etc. (Bell, 1972). On debt, understood as an ontological question, see Voegelin (2022).

²⁷ Particularly significant, from this point of view, is the research carried out by Irene Becci and colleagues (2020). They discovered in Mexico, in relation to the cult of “Mother Nature”, exactly the process of “disneyfication” illustrated here: today, an “aestheticized” divinity is venerated, stripped of the terrible connotations belonging, instead, to the original pre-Hispanic Goddess. This well-documented research also highlights the importance of the concept of “energy”.

association between flesh and sin is broken, at the same time, the link between sin and the Fall is spoiled: it follows that the symbolic rehabilitation of the body – or rather this radical ‘imaginal inversion’ (VS Christian tradition) – causes postmodern spirituality to erase death from its horizon of meaning. For our analytical purposes, it is important to highlight how the antithetical relationships with the body established by Christianity on the one hand and by the new forms of spirituality on the other, show with great precision the adherence of the former to the “diurnal order” and of the latter to the “nocturnal” one: this leads to a positive valorization of sexuality. From a source of “anxiety” and “heroic” control (Christianity), it becomes an exclusive source of pleasure, liberation (Durand, 2013, pp. 135, 249), and even spiritual growth, as it fosters greater self-awareness (new forms of spirituality). This positive axiological valorization of the body and sexuality, therefore, draws its driving force also from an emotional reaction to the Christian symbolism (Albanese, 1993, p. 140). Archetypically, it is not surprising that the symbolism of water is associated with a relationship with the sacred that gives such importance to sexuality. There is a rigorous ‘kinship’ between water-feminine-sexuality since water is, first of all, the “archetypal image” – as Mircea Eliade recalls – of “cosmic fecundity”: it is from here that any “virtuality” can be generated. This fact is incontrovertibly confirmed by the myths underlying a countless number of religions and cults, in which water always is the *element* from which life arises (Eliade, 2018, pp. 135, 136). However, the failure to emerge from the *aquatic cosmos* condemns individuals to the ‘archetypal assault’ of the “Child”: “uterus” and “sea” refer to each other, so that *immersion*, cultivated throughout *the entire life*, forces to “non-existence”, in the sense of a ‘possession’ by the “*puer aeternus*” which prevents the correct fulfillment of the “individuation process” (Jung & Kerényi, 1964, pp. 80-82, 83, 118, 119). The positive valorization of sexuality becomes more understandable by paying attention – according to Mircea Eliade – to the symbolic dimension of the “orgiastic” state: it fosters a scenario of ‘undifferentiation’ that promises a return to the Totality that is typical of the original state, regarding the imaginal regression to the maternal womb (of the Great Mother). Very indicative is the fact that always “Great Goddesses” administered the collective moments of boundless carnal confusion: these rituals, on the one hand, represent an involution to the “preformal” and, on the other, reinvigorate “the circuit of biocosmic energy” (Eliade, 1989, p. 30; 2009a, p. 290).

6. Some final remarks and conclusions

The new forms of spirituality – unlike Christianity, as we have seen – are therefore born already “disneyfied”, so to speak. Their authoritative foundation rests *from the very beginning* on ‘halved symbolism’ whose genealogy can be traced back to approximately the 1960s. It matters little if the contents of this symbolism are derived (also) from the most ancient traditions: it is necessarily weakened by a conception already entirely involved in the “simulacral” processes typical of postmodernity. The new forms of spirituality are, in other words, a figuration resulting from the “expressive revolution” (Parsons, 1984) and the “silent” one (Inglehart, 1971), a morphology of the sacred which therefore reflects the (counter)cultural axiological hierarchy of the *baby boomer* generation (Roof, 1999). Edgar Morin (1970) remarks how it was precisely in that period that “*Disneyien*” stances towards the world spread: the most ferocious of predators becomes the best friend of the most defenseless of children, in the name of an “acosmism of love” (Weber, 1980) cooked in a postmodern sauce²⁸. In the decades that separate us from that time, the postmodern scale of values has become radicalized above all by virtue of the ‘intrusive’ expansion of consumerism and the digital universe (Lyon, 2002): indeed this state of affairs has considerably affected the changes in the relationship with the sacred domain especially due to the effects produced by socialization of the youngest people in the “infosphere” (Morcellini & Fabris, 2025; Camorrino, 2025a).

This means, to put it bluntly, that the new forms of spirituality have never symbolically synthesized in their imagery the constitutive “ambivalence” of the human condition, systematically repressing the dilemmatic aspects that this condition has *since always* brought with it. But this – if what has been said so far is plausible – exposes individuals in an unprecedented way to ‘archetypal possessions’ due to the “numinosity” that the mysteries of evil, suffering, injustice, and death ineluctably unleash. I have repeatedly illustrated the symbolic triad that underpins the ‘aquatic’ archetypology of new forms of spirituality: “aquatic-nocturnal-maternal”. However, this ‘imaginal chain’ thus outlined appears ‘headless’, because it is deprived of its “shadow” ‘link’. As a whole, it should instead look like this: “water-night-mother-death” (Bachelard,

²⁸ I have elsewhere stressed how narcissism can be considered, in some respects, a symmetrical postmodern form of Weberian “acosmism”. With a crucial difference: absolute love for the ‘neighbor’, regardless of who he is (as “brothers in Christ”: “acosmism of love”), is replaced by a generalized disdain (even more exacerbated toward oneself: “narcissism”). In both cases – but for antithetical reasons – we witness, ultimately, the disappearance of the *alter* from the Ego’s lifeworld (Camorrino, 2026).

2024, pp. 57 and ff.; 2005, pp. 37-39; Durand, 2013, pp. 108 and ff.; Eliade, 2009a, pp. 169 and ff.; Jung, 2014, p. 1718). The removal of death from the ‘imaginal chain’ – this is, after all, the hypothesis underlying this essay – has very significant implications for the lifeworld of postmodern spirituality. Experiencing life within an *aquatic cosmos* that has not developed adequate antibodies against the poisonous irruptions of reality, means finding oneself particularly vulnerable to ‘archetypal assaults’: the “disneyfication”, in making wolves into lambs (illusorily), prevents any complete process of symbolization that can contain the terrible aspects of existence.

Symbolic disenchantment produces a “raw” re-enchantment of experience: the radical ‘undifferentiation’ of the cosmos of the new forms of spirituality is a mimesis of the narcissistic fusion. This condition does not allow individuals to “compensate” for the “shadow” side of social existence, since this cosmos cannot provide the emotional ‘containment’ that would instead be ensured by the integrative function of the archetypal “reconciliation of opposites”. The magical attitude typical of postmodern spirituality, by virtue of which it is believed possible to act in a “psychomorphic” sense towards reality, shaping it (illusorily) according to one’s own desires. For these reasons, individuals (narcissist ones) nurture fantasies of omnipotence and immortality²⁹ that do not contrast the ‘archetypal possession’, but rather favor its exponential chronicity. By mutilating the “equivocality” of the symbol it *naturally* carries, it nullifies the psyche’s chances to cope effectively with the enigmas inherent in the human condition³⁰. Those enigmas, in other words, that carry with them the greatest charge of “numinosity”: death, evil, injustice, even love. This “nocturnal” ‘undifferentiation’, stripped of its “ambivalence”, does not produce merely a state of unprecedented freedom. Rather, at the same time, a sense of complete exposure to the assaults of the outside world. A transfiguration of the “negative inflation” fallout of the archetypal mutilation. It thus imposes its repressed side: the result, therefore, is not *just* the feeling of most radical, enthusiastic libertarian emancipation from any constraint, but *also* “panic” (Cesareo & Vaccarini, 2012, pp. 51, 52, 53).

Really to conclude: this article aimed to apply the theoretical perspective of the sociology of imagery and depth sociology to the analysis of contemporary Western religious phenomena and new forms of spirituality. The reader has to give the final judgment on the potential usefulness of this initial and perfectible attempt.

²⁹ I apply here, in an original way, some reflections by Vincenzo Cesareo and Italo Vaccarini (2012), from whom I also took the concepts of “raw” and “psychomorphic”.

³⁰ On this topic, see Ricoeur (1966; 2021).

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