



Societies fragmented after the Protestant Reformation

So, we find that what keeps modernity together is something very fragile.

By: Editorial Staff | Source: accionfamilia.org

The journalist Giulia Galeotti wrote in the newspaper L'Osservatore Romano an interesting review of the book “The Unintended Reformation – How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society”, by the American historian Brad S. Gregory.

According to this review, the place of the Protestant reform in European history seemed clear to many sectors of contemporary opinion. Released more than five centuries ago, it would have been transformed into a distant event of the political dynamics, the economic system, the moral debates and the social problems that the world is now undergoing. However, the aforementioned historian tries to prove the exact opposite, which is to say, that the reform continues to mark our present in depth.

From where is the current exasperated pluralism of religious and civil creeds is born? From the fact that there is a lack of a substantial shared idea of the common good, or that our societies are so fragmented that they usually consider the truth to be a relative and an opinion issue?

In Gregory's view, the hyper pluralism in all areas that characterizes our time is the long-term effect of the structural earthquake that marked the middle of the second millennium of our era, crumbling the system of intellectual, moral and society of the West, which until then was in force.

The complex and entangled mess derived from the transformation – and partly from the rejection – of the traditions of medieval Christendom gradually replaced that univocal religious fabric that had been twinned with Western societies. It was precisely the diffusion of the idea of religious freedom which propagated a notion of subjective and arbitrary religion, contrary to the notion until then universally shared, with deeply harmful effects in our days.

The scholar reveals himself justifiably concerned for the dangerous moral Relativism that replaced the virtue of charity, of what is an unethical policy.
Two martyrs of the protestant persecution in England

For him, religious freedom was progressively transformed into the freedom of religion, allowing the growth of a hopelessly fragmented society. A fragmented reality would be the inheritance that we received from the protestant reformation: intellectual disagreements are now undone in tiny specialized speeches; the idea that modern science – supposed source of all truth – necessarily undermines the religious creed; a therapeutic view of religion; a series of smuggling moral values, which attempts to fertilize a sterile liberalism; and the institutional certainty that only secular universities would be able to offer knowledge.

That fragmentation also altered historical research. Gregory continually returns to this point, criticizing the way of making history and conditioning young people, imposing rigid categories, reducing the past to a series of temporary blocks. This prevents a real understanding of history, which is only clarified over time. Thus, many historians – in an analogous way to their colleagues in other disciplines – tend to have an exasperated particularism, a fragmentation, ending up losing their overall vision in their disciplines.

The analysis seems especially accurate at this beginning of the 21st century when moral relativism and, moreover, the subjectivism are deeply marking our times. But that position, which may seem sympathetic and modern (or postmodern) to some, necessarily leads to the outbreak of society, because it can only survive when the individuals who compose it have principles in common, which are the basis of their relations and their laws.

So we find that what keeps modernity together is a very fragile thing. And the effects are stronger every day.