

Sport and Christianity: Similes and Reciprocal Influences of Two Pillars of Global Culture

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Sport and Christianity are two phenomena which have remote origins: the first was born in Ancient Greece, the second has established itself within the Jewish culture as a point of rupture and progress compared to the previous tradition. Both have influenced each other reciprocally in many occasions through the contact between the original cultures.

Both of them have evolved in time until they reached today a mass distribution on the entire planet, characterizing themselves as two of the pillars of western culture. Today globalized on a global scale.

We can find an initial example of the reciprocal influences between Hellenic culture and Jewish-Christian culture in the *ascesis*, a practice shared but not invented by the Christians. Ascesis is a word coming from the world of Greek sport. The sportsman trains in order to achieve outstanding performances.

The sportsman is the one who trains for exceptional performance, trying to always give his best, to "give the best of himself", in fact! From the sports world, the word moved to the sphere of philosophy.

Philosophers trained in order to achieve inner freedom. Furthermore, in San Paulo, sport is considered as metaphor of Christian life. This parallelism between Christian values and sports ethics is afterwards spoken about again by some Fathers of the Church and it has remained alive also during the Contemporary age, as it is possible to notice in the numerous «speeches» pronounced by the last Popes.

A line of circularity and fruitful reciprocity with Christian thinking appears by analyzing the foundations and the values which characterize sport. Values such as honesty, solidarity, loyalty, perseverance, altruism, peace, justice, fortitude, self-control, wisdom, etc, are expressed through sport. Sport is joy of life,

play, fun. All the factors that constitute the strong cultural, ethical and educational valence, which materializes itself in creating development and permanent growth opportunities of man in the totality and truth of its values and its needs. Sport is expression of the richness of the human being, much more valid and appreciable than having, and therefore much above the severe production and consumption laws and every other life consideration that is purely utilitarian and hedonistic.

There is an ethical crucial need that conscience knows not to delete: that of turning sports practice into a reality which services the person, in the totality of his values and necessities.

It is the evangelic and at the same time rational principle: «not man for sport, but sport for man».

Sport, as an educational vehicle with wide spread diffusion, is on the same wavelength of the Christian message for the same reason that the essence of real sport shares the majority of Christian values and its practical dimension allows to stage, in real terms, the «game field» in which those values can be reached.

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