

Adults 5.0

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Abstract: Without denying the allusion to the sensory web, Adults 5.0 is a characterization of postmodern man, its name is given by the five topics from which the study of the adult is approached: without transcendence, without truth, without limits, without morality and without politics; it arises within the framework of the project “Educating from and for the vocation”, which conceives the call as the most important and transcendental historical aspect of the human being; use the bibliographic, descriptive, documentary method and combines the methodology of speculative theology with the methods of social and psychological sciences, where it is observed that the person is happy when he dedicates his life to what he is passionate about, that is, to his vocation. Although typification is just one step within the broad field of philosophical and psychological understanding of the subject, offering educational inputs so that man can get out of line, think, project and take on the business of his own life, is a good tool on the path of human fulfillment and a contribution to the construction of the culture of vocation.

Key words: adult, education, duty, freedom, vocation

1. Introduction

Oswald Spengler, Amando de Miguel, Robert Sarah and many other authors have been speaking about the decline of the West and specially about the decline of Europe; however, in the book *Convertire Peter Pan. Il destino della fede nella società dell'eterna giovinezza* Armando Matteo treats the subject with great originality. He claims that the Covid 19 pandemic has showed the type of adult that constitutes today's society: an adult without transcendence, without truth, without limits, without morals, without politics; he deifies and worships youth and sees it as the ideal of life; in short, he suffers from the Peter Pan syndrome.

When the adult does not assume his role and refuses to assume his own personal characteristics, he disfigures himself and leaves children and young people without referents; he liquefies society. The liquid society confuses the structures, the roles et other aspects that before seemed be clear. In this way, he puts in great difficulties the actions that traditionally formed and gave cohesion to the society. What is the role of the Church now? What is the current role of the school? Now, we enquire only about two of the aspects closest to own interest: Education and evangelization processes must be carried out? If the answer is pleasing: What is the curriculum trough which they should be addressed?

2. The Peter Pan Syndrome

The postmodern adult has shifting frontiers and they are drawn by the momentary comfort of individualism

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and pleasure. The flag of all colors tends to impose itself in the world, not only in the sexual field, but with this mentality of entertainment, experimentation and anything goes, postmodern man can go from one extreme to the other, or make any kind of combination in traditionally institutional matters such as marriage, politics, religions, education and even in eating habits. “Every affiliation and every decision can be questioned [...] after all, who could offer any lessons in consistency today?” (Matteo, 2021, pp. 43–44).

The life of the Adult 5.0, seems lighter; as A. Matteo (2021, p. 53): Free from religious and secular transcendence, they do not want to leave their minority, to participate in the life of the *polis* or to create a more just world; what they want is a holiday by the sea, to spend time take care of their affections, taking care of their bodies, a full fridge, having sex, having fun, dreaming and a capsule of micro-autonomy to forget tedium and death.

And maybe hasn't the recent pandemic demonstrated firsthand how closely the economies of Western countries are tied to the cause of human enjoyment? There is an economy and a leisure market never seen in the history of mankind. Restaurants, bars, pizzerias, discotheques, hotels, spas, health spas, gyms, beauty centers, slimming centers and many other markets related to pleasure and well-being have suddenly found themselves in the midst of a crisis due to the measures necessary to contain the coronavirus and have needed large sums of money to avoid closing down altogether (Matteo, 2021, p. 46).

The present condition of life enjoys so much charm and splendor, that there is hardly anyone willing to give up, for example, the speed of transportation, medical treatments, domestic appliances, digital communication and the infinite possibilities offered by the Internet, advances in cosmetic and technological fashion and civil and legal conquests; “no one would want to go back on the achievements and the new conditions in which human existence unfolds today.” (Matteo, 2021, p. 45); The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of The Second Vatican Council (hereinafter GS) was aware of this issue and opened the debate on maturity and personalization:

Therefore, mutual human relationships multiply in ever-increasing progression while at the same time “socialization” itself leads to new relationships, without at the same time determining in parallel the corresponding maturity in individuals and truly personal relationship “personalization” (GS 6).

It becomes difficult to answer the question posed by A. Matteo, whether “it was the youthful conversion of the current adult generations that gave life and form to the economy and the market that today guide the destiny of the world, or whether it was the current forms of the economy and the market that gave rise to the youthful conversion of the adult generations” (Matteo, 2021, p. 50). What is easy to see is that commerce focuses its advertising on making us younger, better looking, fitter and more enjoyable.

The endemic period (in which we are) permit us to see that thirst to return to be as before, to return as soon as possible to enjoy life, to be young again (forever). Paradoxically, what we do go back to being as we were before, is the money that young people tend to have in their pockets. The real legacy of the pandemic is a stellar public debt, skyrocketing inflation rates and widespread impoverishment.

Here is the adult we have become: a mass of people in their 40s, 50s and 60s who do everything they can not to grow old, reaching old age without ever having been adults, being in any case too busy staying young, thus creating the conditions to get rid of the truly young (Matteo, 2021, p. 51).

The Peter Pan syndrome in postmodern society must be taken very seriously, when parents and teachers stop fulfilling their role of “authority” and offer themselves as “friends”; not only do they leave children and young people without points of reference, but as “false youth” they occupy their spaces. What we are seeing is a profound question of mentality, it is not a simple fashion or superficial attitude; Pope Francis warns: “this is not a

secondary issue [...] Understanding this allows us to distinguish the joy of youth from a false cult of youth that some use to seduce young people and use them for their ends” (*Christus vivit* 80).

At the same time, the manipulators use another resource: a worship of youth, as if the symbol of this new cult, and then everything that has to do with that body is idolized and desired without limits, and everything that is not young is looked down upon with contempt. But it is a weapon that in the first place ends up degrading young people, emptying them of real values, using them for personal, economic or political gain (*Christus vivit* 82).

The postmodern adult “fed by the dominant economic-cultural machinery that degrades and empties the same adults and young people, for the unique purpose of making money” (Matteo, 2021, p. 52), has conquered freedom and uniqueness as never before and feels that these characteristics are what identify him; but the results show that they were not prepared for such a gift “it is like a very powerful car put in the hands of children who only know how to ride the tricycle [...] It is not surprising, therefore, that the contemporary world is also marked by so many ambivalences and an infinite series of contradictions” (Matteo, 2021, p. 48). “The profile of an increasingly introverted, narcissistic and egomaniacal, cynical and manipulative adult is thus substantially imposed. In a word, more and more ‘intransitive’, that is, the opposite of what it really means and implies to be an adult” (Matteo, 2021, p. 53).

“An adequate understanding of man, makes possible an appropriate awareness of his dimensions, of his deep transcendental being, of his existential axiological system, of his εὐδαιμονία and vocation” (Sarmiento, 2021, p. 455). Even if school must necessarily be open, education must have clear parameters What kind of adults are we forming? What kind of education should future adults currently receive? It seems that “the idea of educating from and for vocation opens space; a task that implies turning the page to the disenchantment produced by the banking, industrial and selfish education of the last two centuries” (Sarmiento, 2021, p. 455).

3. Physiognomy of the Adult 5.0

Matteo (2021, pp. 34–35) presents the physiognomy of postmodern adults, he identifies them as: private beings detached from any belonging (except the *oikos* and the family in its utilitarian sense), he highlights heterogeneity as a reaction to the homogeneity lived both in the bourgeoisie and in the proletariat, he also highlights man in his subjective autonomy, but at the same time united by a logic of life and a system of unconscious mythologies. The postmodern adult abruptly and progressively eliminates that condition of subordination of man’s existence to hierarchical schemes. Thus, the subjective man sets himself as the “measure of all things” and, inasmuch as there is nothing beyond or above man himself, he claims the maximum of his freedom and his singularity. The five aspects with which A. Matteo (2021, pp. 35–42) deepens the characterization of postmodern man are: the adult without transcendence, the adult without truth, the adult without limits, the adult without morals and the adult without politics.

3.1 The Adult Without Transcendence

When man considers that there is nothing beyond or above himself, he loses the notion of any kind of transcendence. First, he denies the divine order and second, he denies his own historical and existential transcendence. Man is from earth (human-*humus*) and he is for earth. The paradox of his thirst for greatness and the encounter with his deep weakness arises: Man suffers not only from the pain and the progressive dissolution of his body, but also, and even more, from the fear of perpetual extinction” (GS 18).

By losing his sense of transcendence, he loses his most secure horizon and ends up accommodating himself to the present world (Rm 12, 2). He gives himself “to that spirit of vanity and malice which turns human activity, ordered to the service of God and man, into an instrument of sin” (GS 37). Man in his vanity no longer considers himself a debtor to anyone, but on the contrary suspects that everyone owes him and ends up making both the religious and the state apparatus accountable to him; and he even blames the establishment for being responsible for his diminishment, for being the one who has brought him to his minority and made him unviable.

Many people who live in a practical materialism are very far from clearly perceiving this dramatic state, just as those who are oppressed by misery have no occasion to think about it. Many think that it is in a varied interpretation of this reality that they will find peace of mind. Others hope for the true and full liberation of humanity through human effort alone while they cherish the conviction that the future reign of man on earth will completely fulfill all the aspirations of their hearts (GS 10).

For S. Fontana, the perspective of eternal life is also a social issue, and he wonders if society has responsibilities beyond the earthly life of people, also for their integral salvation, and if it is possible to work seriously for material salvation without opening oneself to the perspective of a duty towards a spiritual and eternal salvation. “There is no doubt that one of the most worrying signs of our time is the weakening of the attitude of people to identify in things, in nature, a vocation, a call to assume a responsibility” (Fontana, 2009).

3.2 The Adult Without Truth

This occurs “when man is unconcerned about seeking the truth and the good, so that his conscience is progressively darkened by the habit of sinning” (GS 16). In this case, rather than the absolute refusal of truth, A. Matteo describes postmodern man as “a person without a truth” and liquefied in a proliferation of truths. Since there are no dominant truths and the system imposed by the dominant classes is no longer valid, nor those proposed by the churches or creeds, in order to “agree on the truth” one has to appeal to the “ecumenism of minorities”.

In this field of relativism, roles are combined and diluted, as are professions, religions and stages of life. And as soon as the boundaries become shifting, multi-affiliation becomes necessary. “The higher needs are relatively weak and do not make themselves felt with particular need and urgency. That is why they are relegated and crushed by more material concerns” (Gevaert, 1984, p. 18). S. Fontana, quoting J. Ratzinger, affirms that “man is not the fruit of coincidence, nor of a set of convergences, determinisms or psycho-chemical interactions; he is a being who enjoys a freedom that, while taking into account his nature, transcends it” (Fontana, 2009).

It is true that such charity and kindness should never make us indifferent to truth and goodness. On the contrary, the same charity impels the disciples of Christ to proclaim the saving truth to all men. But a distinction must be made between error, which must always be rejected, and the mistaken man, who always retains his dignity as a person (GS 28).

For this reason, “the alienated man is one who refuses to transcend himself and live the experience of the gift of self and the formation of an authentic human community, oriented to its ultimate destiny: God” (Fontana, 2009). “Therefore, there is no humanism if it is not open towards the Absolute, in the recognition of a vocation, which offers the true idea of human life” (*Populorum Progresio* 7). “If the vocation is not full, it cannot even be a vocation. If it is full, it reveals transcendence. If it is not, man is the victim of an anthropology of desire, which does not constitute true humanism” (Fontana, 2009).

3.3 The Adult Without Limits

60 years ago Vatican II formulated that “through the ceaseless activity of his intelligence, man has certainly made great progress over the centuries in the experimental, technical and liberal sciences. In our time, moreover, he has achieved extraordinary successes in research and in the mastery of the material world” (GS 15). A. Matteo, for his part, stresses man's extraordinary capacity to surpass his own achievements and, thanks to techno-scientific progress, to set ever more ambitious goals; this would be great, if it were it not for the fact that the great majority of postmodern men, in their superficiality, have come to lose sight of their own limits.

We can find two sides regarding this unfinished man: one proposed by A. Matteo in which he describes the contemporary adult as a laboratory of continuous experiments that turn him into a kind of animal that has never fully grown, that has never become fully adult; and an optimistic vision that sees man as the one who must constantly be born (born again) completely; and for this purpose he must discover the call. The vocation leads us to be born again: to be born completely (Jn 20:16; 21:18–19).

Vocation is the most important part of being, it is what orients existence, the reason for which we were created, the motor of the present and what feeds dreams and authentic aspirations [...] Vocation is not the greatest treasure, vocation is the treasure, its discovery and experience, give meaning and fullness to existence (Sarmiento, 2021, p. 99).

Man has the happy task of being born again (Jn 3:3 - 8). “The animal is born once, while man has never been born at all, he has the work of being begotten again, or waiting to be begotten” (Cabiedas, 2019, p. 225). “For the lark and the hare there is but a single way of being what they are. But for man there are millions of ways of being man” (Barraca, 2003, p. 122).

For those who claim unlimited (selfish) freedom, the other is a hindrance, an external conditioning and a ruin to be fought against. Thus, the worst enemy is death, because it completely breaks freedom and makes life absurd (Gevaert, 1984, p. 17). For his part, A. Matteo induces a reflection on death and, in a provocative way, it seems distant to him, both physically and psychologically. In the physical aspect, because of the vital capacity that is achieved thanks to several factors, and in the psychological aspect insofar as man wants to disengage himself from this reality. Death is a problem, “death tends to be considered as a fact. But it is an unsatisfactory fact. And so it is preferred not to think about it, closing the door to the possible discovery of its deepest dimensions” (Gelabert, 2006, p. 58).

It is evident that “man holds in his hands the period of life that is between his birth and his death; it is as if in history, at least for man himself, a cross section were made and given to him to write each page and each chapter; this compendium will be ‘printed’ the day after his death. His history” (Sarmiento, 2021, p. 91). On this topic, A. Matteo, shows how postmodern man holds enjoyment in high regard and tries to ignore responsibility, an issue that was raised several centuries ago.

The only thing that consoles us from our miseries is diversion, and yet it is the greatest of our miseries. For it is that above all which prevents us chiefly thinking about ourselves, and which causes us to lose insensibly. Were it not for it we would live in distress, and this distress would impel us to seek a more solid means of getting out of such a state. But amusement entertains us and causes us to arrive insensibly at death (Pascal, 1985, p. 217).

3.4 The Adult Without Moral

In singularity there is no moral criterion, especially when the ego is the prophet of enjoyment and pleasure. So it is common to find manifestations, such as the one known as “plebeian vitalism” (Matteo, 2021, p. 39): what has been lived in the logic of consumption and spectacle since ancient times in popular festivities is taken up

again, to mix vices with cynicism and disenchantment of life with nihilistic dyes. Then, let's live, life is two days and we are already finishing the first one; the postmodern society assumes the enjoyment without limits and between the exaltation and the hangover, illusions and utopia are lost; the status quo is labeled as the cause of deception, under the constant sensation of unfulfilled dreams. The daily sensation of eternal return and eternal defeat, as graphically represented by the "myth of Sisyphus".

Life centered on consumption and enjoyment, has among its manifestations "the latest fashion" (cosmetic and technological); we know that the strategy of consumerism is to keep the consumer pending long-term satisfaction, to keep him as "the eternally unsatisfied" and for this purpose the advertising of the "earthly paradise" is used. It is the reign of the hedonistic culture, sustained by an economy of consumption; to such an extent that it is necessary to consume not only goods, but also life itself. To consume and enjoy, which in the end is the only thing that remains, "que me quiten lo bailao"¹. The triumphant idea seems to be that:

Life is pure immanence surrounded by death; ultimate ends, collective causes, great objectives are illusions or, rather, deceptions inflicted by the powerful on the popular classes; each individual pursues only his own pleasure and his own personal or family interest; reality is immutable; every political regime is equivalent; human beings are too weak to behave coherently; the very problem of coherence is meaningless and abstract; we must enjoy life while we can, with sex and consumption, with entertainment and games, food and drugs (Matteo, 2021, p. 39).

However, it is possible to think that "this period of rights has finished by intimate consumption and by intimate contradiction. If everyone has the right to have only rights, why should anyone have the duty to respect this right" (Fontana, 2009). It seems that the realities are not so murky and that it is always possible to witness an "ethical-historical appeal [that] also aims at the creation of new and better structures, capable of ensuring greater justice" (Gevaert, 1984, p. 25).

3.5 The Adult Without Politics

A. Matteo, prefers to call the post-modern adult a post-political subject; a reality that happens after the collapse of the "traditional" concept of family and politics. In consequence, alternative models are promulgated against them; Similarly, in both cases the utilitarian sense prevails. If we could find an example, we could refer to the "politics of the administrator of a building": A president is appointed because he is needed, there is no alternative, but only to promote the practical good of the conglomerate, but each of the neighbors claims for himself individuality, singularity and unrepresentability. The paradox of the public and the private:

We all demand a total exercise of freedom: freedom of movement, freedom of ideological expression, freedom of economic and financial speculation, freedom of gender preference and sexual tastes, and at the same time, almost naively, we demand to enjoy a state apparatus capable of offering everyone legal protection, social guarantees and security, which inevitably requires the application of laws, taxes, restrictions, controls, cameras everywhere that clash precisely with the needs of free maneuver of individuals (Matteo, 2021, p. 49).

Post-political and post-family man has fallen into the overvaluation of the animal and the undervaluation of the human; he humanizes the animal (he puts clothes on it, puts it in its habitat, forces it to have a series of rituals, takes it to school, etc.) and provides it with all the "comforts"; meantime people say: "I don't want children, because I want to live", "I prefer to have a dog than to have a child"... and they lavish praises exalting the qualities of the animal, while they fall into "aporophobia" and close their eyes to the misery of others. Those who take to

¹ "Que me quiten lo bailao" is a spanish colloquial expression that means: the important thing in our life is to enjoy.

the street the morning to demonstrate against bullfighting, are the same ones who go out in the afternoon to demand the right to the interruption of pregnancy and at night to claim the right to die with dignity.

We are witnessing the spectacle of life and life as a spectacle. The question may arise, where could one feel more free and unique at the same time than on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok; yet it is in the same social networks that one finds the most fertile ground for falsehood, deception and crime. “Where there is the greatest space for the realization of one’s own freedom and uniqueness, there is also the greatest space for the greatest danger and the greatest destabilization of the human being” (Matteo, 2021, p. 42).

The desire and the illusion can have an unlimited character, “but in order to coexist, it is necessary that this dream becomes concrete and when something becomes concrete it acquires a measure, this canon propitiates a limit and this limit is the norm, which becomes like the ‘contract’ of a people” (Sarmiento, 2010, p. 197); the contract, which can only be based on duty (Fontana, 2009), because when man has the right to have only rights, he ends up with the right to nothing and nothing, p. 197); the contract, which cannot be founded but on duty (Fontana, 2009), because when man has the right to have only rights he ends up with the right to nothing, and, it becomes the “quicio that allows every citizen and every citizen to move, only with the limit that he, in some way, accepts” (Sarmiento, 2010, p. 1979).

4. Conclusion

The reality of postmodern man leads to a revision of the curriculum on which education is based. Every human being, at birth, is endowed with a “toolbox”, he is like an “upgradeable artifact”, in other words, he is endowed with possibilities and potentialities; it is his responsibility to discover these talents (Mt 25:14–30), to develop and acquire charisms (1 Cor 12:4–12) and to lead his life towards fullness (Mt 5:48). The role of education is to find these notches (or ports); to discover and respond to this thirst, to these yearnings, to these fervent desires of man, so that faith and life may go along the same path.

The GS raises awareness about the multiple and contradictory opinions that humanity constructs about itself and warns of the convenience of giving an effective response that, without ignoring the weaknesses of man, makes him recognize his dignity and vocation. The same document bets on life and its transcendence; and from here opens the space to advance towards the construction of a culture of vocation. When vocation has a central place in a society, its members find the meaning of their lives; otherwise, man and therefore society are meaningless. “God’s call, insofar as it is perceived by man, produces a new vision of life” (Rodríguez, 1986, p. 20).

A “vocational culture” (John Paul II, 1997, p. 2), is proposed as an alternative to the egocentric vision of man (Gevaert, 1984, pp. 14–20) and of a society that gives primacy to rights and relegates duties to second place (Fontana, 2009). Achieving excellence in vocation is the natural goal of the daily effort of personal growth, concomitant with happiness. Vocation overflows the purely natural understanding and opens man to his historical and existential transcendence (Sarmiento, 2021, pp. 94–95).

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