

Webinar: Anthropological Ecology in sport

Introduction

Dear all,

I want to thank Santiago Perez De Camino and the Dicastery of Laity, Family and Life for this opportunity to think about the future of sport after the pandemic.

In my introduction to this webinar, I will focus on three topics: the first topic is an analysis of the context, the second one is the situation of sport during the pandemic and the last one is the need to rethink the future of sport.

The context

The end of the Modern Era

Pope Francis, some years ago, said that we are living in a time "that is not only an era of changes, but it is the change of an era". The Modern Era is finishing and a new time is starting, Post-modernity. Also, Pope Benedict XVI, during a meeting with the roman clergy in preparation for Christmas in 2010, said that the XXI Century is similar to the end of the Ancient Roman Empire, when the Ancient Era was finishing and the Middle Age had not yet started.

The COVID pandemic as an accelerator of change

Moreover, today, we are living during the COVID Pandemic: COVID is not the cause of this change, but probably it is a consequence and surely it is an accelerator. In a few months all the people all around the world had to face a new way of life and a new kind of social relationship. The Pandemic is either a menace for our lifestyle or a window open to the future, that could let us understand which are the new categories of the future.

After the COVID emergency we will come back to live normally, but surely our lifestyle will be changed.

The crisis of sport

Strength

And sport? What's happening to sport?

Modern Sport has arrived at the top of its success, after a continuous growth. This development brings it to "hubris", an excess of success, that hides a lot of deviation. The Vatican sport document "Giving the best of yourself" (page 34) says that there are some deviations and serious risks in the Sport system (the debasement of the body, doping, corruption and violence of supporters) that "can be understood to be the result of an unrestrained orientation towards success and the enormous economic and political interests emanating from sporting competitions".

However, the sport system appeared to go on. Sport is structured in a system, built to be strong and hardy. It has survived all shocks like world wars, economic crises, terrorism, ...

Fragility

But the COVID shock is something different, because it puts in evidence that the Sport system is not stand-alone and waterproof, but it is fragile: for the first time sport isn't something positive, healthy and

helpful for people, but it is poised like a big problem because of the pandemic diffusion. In a lot of countries sport was (and is) locked down or strongly limited.

Resilience

We know that this situation is producing a terrible crisis to the sport system and Sport is trying to react to the evil of COVID with its power of resilience. Sport is trying to make itself safe and to live as normal as possible. The goal, when the COVID pandemic will be overcome, is to come back to where we were before.

However, are we sure that is good to come back as before? Do we really want to come back to a Sport system that was sick? Pope Francis said us that we cannot think of being healthy in a sick world. So it would be the same in sport.

We have to go beyond the strategy of resilience, because the goal of sport shouldn't be to come back as before. We have to try to find a new way for sport, to become better than before. The change of era asks us to change also sport. Sport has to change, otherwise it will appear old in a new era that is coming.

Antifragility

I try to explain what I mean when using the concept of "Antifragility" that was created in 2013 by Nassim Nicholas Taleb (Libian philosopher and mathematician who lives in the United States).

Antifragility is something that goes beyond resilience: something resilient is hurt, suffers, but resists to shocks, coming back the same as before; instead something antifragile feeds on changes, uncertain contexts, crisis, ... to develop, to change itself and adapt itself to new contexts. It's strongly connected to the context and it tries to be a linked part of a bigger body. Example: DNA is antifragile.

A new vision of sport

What does it mean that sport should be antifragile?

Does it mean that we have to change the sport system? No, but it means that we need a new vision that lets sport be antifragile, that lets it find a new rule in the next social system.

We don't have to kill or reduce the sport system, but we need to change its scale of values.

The Church has been interested in sport since it was born and I think that the Church has a vision (and also a responsibility) to rethink the future of sport.

Pope Francis invites us to adopt a new anthropological ecology in his encyclical "Laudato Si" (Laudato Si 118: "There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology"): he offers new categories to think of in the future, that are categories that go beyond the ecology as a movement to save Creation and that can help us also to rethink sport, to rethink an anthropological ecology through sport.

Laudato Si' offers us a vision that is antifragile: more than resilience (that means try to live as before); the Pope invites us to an anthropological conversion. We will have to be "new wine in new wineskins". The Church can contribute to rethinking the future of sport, because in sport it has an anthropological vision and also a lot of best practices of antifragility.

I want to thank again the Dicastery because these webinars mean that the Church wants to take the field and play this match.

