

**CULTURE OF THE XXI CENTURY. :
FOOTBALL AS A QUASI-RELIGION IN THE «SECULAR AGE»**

Rostyslav Polishchuk¹

DOI: https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-588-11-2_58

The modern era can be called «the age of sports», because the latter has taken a prominent place in society. It is no accident that it is a phenomenon of civilized life, one of the important elements of the system of values of modern culture, and in some cases even a mirror of social life.

Sports and physical culture are important elements of modern society, which have enormous potential for a positive impact not only on health, physical perfection, but also on the spiritual world, on human culture, on its outlook, emotions, moral principles, aesthetic preferences. as well as relationships between people, because sport is a cultural practice. According to Fed' V.A., – «cultural practices express worldview traditions in such modes of being as space, time, movement, becoming, and verify cultural creativity in materialization, material subjectivity, artifacts as the object and spiritual» body «of culture» [3, pp. 10–16].

After the last elections to the Ukrainian Parliament, Volodymyr Borodyanskyi, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports of Ukraine, said: «We are accustomed to regard sport as a sport, but it is part of the culture, a model of behavior and an element of inclusion in society» [1]. This thesis clearly emphasizes the above.

In the study of sports, the analytical focus is on symbols. Both athletes and spectators express some symbolism, hold beliefs, and practice sports-related rituals [4]. In the XX century. There was considerable support for the claim that the sport was at least quasi-religious. It is often associated with certain rites or rituals. There are even theories that propose ritual as the basis of the origin of physical culture and sport – in particular, Reynack's theory or A. Gutt-Man's concept is outlined in his book, «From Ritual to Record.» We will not go into the archives of historical details, but let us recall that the Olympic competitions (games) of Ancient Greece were also part of religious activities.

But in the subject of this report, we would like to focus on one of the most popular sports – soccer (soccer). Football is the second most popular sport in the world after athletics (Association for the promotion of the international movement «Sport for All»). With more than three billion followers in the world, it has more followers than Christianity – the largest religion in the world with 2.2 billion followers (according to recent data, there are now 2.1 billion Christians in the world (World Population Clock)). This stunning statistic justifies the assumption that football has a huge impact on people's social life.

If one researched thoroughly, or at least closely followed, football, he would have to draw an analogy with religion or ask the question: «is football at least a quasi-

¹ Lviv State University of Physical Culture named after Ivan Bobersky, Ukraine

religion?» According to Paul Tillich, a German philosopher and theologian, quasi-religion is an entity with an unintentional resemblance to religion or «a state of fascination with the utmost interest...» [2]. Football is reminiscent of religion in how it gives people a collective identity and purpose, and how they experience it through interacting with others.

Sociologist Emil Durkheim suggests that religion is the only system of beliefs and practices that unites its members into a single moral community, into a single collective identity. Football, similar to religion, also gives people a sense of collective (including national) identity. When they play national football teams, they not only play for the trophy, they play to prove pride in their national culture. For example, the rivalry between the Scottish and English, French and German national football teams is deeply rooted in the historical political battles between these countries. The whole point is to assert your identity.

The same is the situation with club football, which is accompanied by huge fan movements (ultras), which also follow certain rules and have a number of rituals inherent to them. Such thematic groups (fandoms) also have a set of attributes of a certain collective or group identity.

In addition, symbolic interaction is at the heart of football, as is religion. The symbolic interaction theory of sociologist George Herbert Mead argues that the value of objects, events, gestures, and behavior comes from the interpretations people give them (If Sunday was not the day of Jesus' resurrection, it would not be different from other days for Christians). This symbolic interaction is also present in the world of football. Football stadiums are not just regular playgrounds. It is interesting to think that sports stadiums and arenas are reminiscent of «temples where followers gather to worship their heroes and pray for their success» [6, p. 200]. They are often built with a deeper and symbolic meaning. For example, at the European Football Championship 2012 in Poland (Gdansk), the stadium «Energia-Gdansk» was built, which, according to the plan, resembles an amber that has long been mined on the Baltic Sea coast.

The most famous players of the game are immortalized in statues (Cristiano Ronaldo, David Beckham, Pele, Lobanovsky), which adorn the stadiums just as the statues of saints and prophets adorn the walls of most churches. Football stadiums, jerseys, statues and museums are all symbols that reinforce the principles and traditions of the game, increasing its popularity.

In addition, players are not just participants in the game. Their lives are the standards by which football fans lead by example and inspiration. Sociologist Christian Smith [5] is of the opinion that humans have a peculiar set of possibilities and characteristics that significantly differentiate them from other creatures (animals) on our planet. He argues that all people whose actions and institutions are composed, motivated and guided by narrative traditions and moral orders are inevitably dependent on them.

This theory is also possible with regard to the football community. Values such as hard work, sacrifice and passion displayed by players on the field are lessons that parents teach their children and the principles that young children admire. Players, in

turn, become «preachers» who support a public image that reflects certain values of the game.

For some fans, the inspiration and admiration of some football players can turn into idolatry. This is especially noticeable from the football fan base in Argentina, where the church was officially created to commemorate the great Argentine footballer Diego Maradona. In this «Maradona Church» the football player is worshiped as a god. His life is considered a pattern that provides guidance for followers just like Jesus' life for a Christian. This is obviously an extraordinary case of admiration, but it means that football creates a community where people can find goals and opportunities.

Although the game of football is strikingly reminiscent of religion, which may be a consequence of the secularization of society, they cannot be said to be identical. There are bases that are not enough to qualify as a religion. Religion refers to the concepts, rituals, experiences, and institutions that people build on their belief in the supernatural, otherworldly, or spiritual. In football, there is no belief system that is part of the world's major religions, such as Christianity. In addition, he lacks the supernatural formation that is the center of existence of the followers (higher cosmic order). Football fans may have their own religious affiliation, but they do not believe that the game is run by a universal supernatural being. Football may not qualify as a religion, but it largely resembles religion. That is why we can consider it a quasi-religion.

References:

1. Borodjanskyj, V. (2019). Sport – ce chastyna kuljтуры: Borodjanskyj roz-poviv pro ob'jednannya Minkuljtu j Minmolodjsportu [24Sport]. Retrieved from: https://24tv.ua/sport/sport_tse_chastyna_kulturi_borodyanskiy_rozpoviv_pro_obyednannya_minkultu_y_minmolodsporu_n1198752. (accessed: 29.09.2019).
2. Tillikh, P. (1995). Izbrannoe. Teologiya kul'tury. [Favorites. Theology of culture] Moskva: Yurist. (in Russian)
3. Fedj, V. A. (2010) Kuljturna praktyka v ontognoseologichnykh vymirakh [Cultural practice in ontognoseological dimensions]. *Aktualjni problemy istoriji, teoriji ta praktyky khudozhnjoji kuljтуры*. Vol. XXIV, pp. 10-16.
4. Kenneth, M. (1979). Brody Institutionalized Sport as Quasi-Religion: Preliminary CONSiDerations. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*. Volume: 3 issue: 2, page(s): 17-27.
5. Smith, Christian. Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture. New York: Oxford UP, 2010. Print.
6. Wann, D. L., Melnick, M. J., Russell, G. W., & Pease, D. G. (2001). Sport fans: The psychology and social impact of spectators. New York: Routledge.