

PASTOR IN THE POSTMODERN

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Abstract

The goal of the present study is to highlight a few focus points based on which further research can be made regarding the identity development of the pastor of any given community pertaining to the Christian faith. We apply our study to Christianity in the light of modern theological and pastoral psychology research due to the fact that this religious context seems the most appropriate for Romania, and specifically to Transylvania. The study presents the development of the personal and professional identity of an individual in the ordained service of the Christian church. We regard the postmodern condition as the framework in which we aim to find the conjuncture of the individual's personal evolution and the maturation of his/her professional identity. Nonetheless we will also refer to a historic context preceding the contemporary timeframe. We shall conclude our study with the presentation of a few perspectives of further research generated by our analysis of the state of fact.

Keywords

Identity, pastor, postmodern, psychology, profession, development, theology

FRAME OF THE STUDY

Postmodernism and/or postmodernity

The postmodern condition as the context of the development of pastoral identity

Conclusion

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Postmodernism and/or postmodernity?

What is postmodernism? How can it be differentiated from postmodernity? When referring to the modern and postmodern ages, many theorists have agreed (Longhurst et al, 2008) that the suffixes „-ity" and „-ism" embrace different meanings. In such case, modernity and postmodernity are considered societal patterns or experiences, while modernism and postmodernism are the reactions given to the multiple aspects (positive or detrimental) resulted from that particular experience.

Modernism was perceived as a form of social progress, a set of new visions and values which mostly pursued the same ideals as those proclaimed by the Enlightenment.

According to Marshal Berman (1983), modernity has reached completion after unfolding throughout three historical stages. The first would be from the beginning of the 16th century up to the end of the 18th century, when people were barely beginning to acknowledge the possibility of improving their quality of life. The second is argued by Berman to be the revolutionary wave of the 1780s and 1790s, which lasts to the beginning of the 20th century. Berman also suggests that the French Revolution has had a direct impact upon the development of a modern public. "People realize that they live in the modern age, but can remember what came before", (qtd in Longhurst et al, 2008: 294).

However, the twentieth century represents the phase in which modernity becomes a general aspect of day-to-day life. It is when Paris is virtually 'reshaped' in terms of architecture, the boulevards grasp a life of their own and the Italian futurists have a strong word to say about the looks of the cities and style itself (Berman, 1983, in Longhurst et al, 2008: 295).

The twentieth century brings forward the power of the motor car as an anthem of the simplification of our means of existence. It is the beginning of speed and information power, due to the rapid expansion of written media and advertisement.

However significant this stage has been for society's advancement, as Giddens (1990: 254) observes, it is no longer brought forward in matters of technology or science. When we talk about the modern age in a historical sense, we tend to look upon it romantically and recollect artistic and philosophical concepts, or simply talk about anything pre-capitalistic. In other words, we no longer talk about modernity, only about modernism.

And it is such discussions that introduce us and make us genuine members of what we are now experiencing as postmodernism, meaning that the postmodernist active observer will perceive, understand, analyze and discuss a subject without framing it in pre-established patterns, as it is commonly noticed in modernistic approaches:

Modernist literary critics do tend to look at works as examples of a 'genre' and to judge them by the 'master code' that prevails within the 'boundary' of the genre, whereas the postmodernist style is simply to view a work as a 'text' with its own particular 'rhetoric' and 'idiolect', but which can in principle be compared with any other text, no matter what sort. (Harvey, 1993 qtd in Aldea, 2000: 24)

Although the concept of postmodernism had been initially related to innovative forms of architecture and philosophical thought, it continued absorbing more meanings until gradually reached the point where it could be correlated to anything opposed to what is viewed as "modernist".

Postmodernism imposes new visions upon society, collective welfare, art, science, technology and so on. As we have already specified, modernity and postmodernity are connected to societal patterns. Therefore, it can be argued that postmodernity implies a shift towards a new historical period, releasing the Marxist pattern of production and embracing the new pattern of consumption. Other features that share their root in postmodernity are informational supremacy, mass media and mass dissemination, information and communication technologies (ICTs).

After decades of flaming critical debate, it has now become the general opinion that postmodernism is too much of a complex puzzle, to be contained by a singular definition: "Romanticism, modernism, postmodernism, however, like humanism or realism, will shift and slide continually with time, particularly in an age of ideological conflict and media hype" (Hassan, 2000: 1).

Its 'birth' is, also, debatable, because it governs a variety of manifestations and fields of activity which all have different starting points. Ihab Hassan (2000) describes it as 'haunting', for it is irrepressible and elusive when it comes to being defined. In addition to his critique upon the concept itself, he has also brought to light a series of occurrences in which the word "postmodernism" appears, that is to say - before it became utterly popular.

Apparently the term was first used around the late 1800s in the British artistic environment, by the painter John Watkins Chapman, with the meaning of 'Post-Impressionism'. Later on, it was adopted by various artists and writers, as a fashion of defining a reaction or an experiment against a particular field of modernist art, whether it was poetry or painting. Finally (or to begin with) in 1959 and 1960, Irving Howe and Harry Levine use postmodernism to designate the decline of the high modernist culture (Hassan, 2000).

In 1979, Jean-François Lyotard, who would eventually become one of the 'founding fathers' of postmodernism theory through his "La Condition Postmoderne", denounces the ending of modernity in the field of philosophy, which would leave room for new philosophical thinking.

It is only in the late 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s that postmodernism takes a more concrete shape and the majority of cultural studies specialists reach a verdict: it is the end of the modern age. As Hassan (2000) himself argues, this is the age when postmodernism is acknowledged also as a "distinct, sometimes positive, development in American culture."

It has been previously mentioned that postmodernism, as a form of "feedback" towards the geopolitical modifications resulted from postmodernity, primarily dealt with architecture and philosophy.

Deconstruction, minimalism, postminimalism, fragmentation, all are postmodern architectural developments which have penetrated various fields of activity, including literature, philosophy and theology as well. Interdisciplinarity is, obviously, a key element in the postmodern era.

The ideas of unpredictability and controlled chaos, together with fragmentation and pluralism, have transcended the barriers of architecture codes to what was expressed as a "plurireaction" against predetermined structures, ideologies, political incorrectness, against the message of condescendence which

transpires from high spheres of education towards lower ones, class discrepancies high and low art and many other consequences of modernity.

Being "polychromic" (Hassan, 2000), postmodernism does not only come as an adverse reaction, but also as a conceptual simplification or a general upgrade on all aspects of life. Having in view the remarks of numerous critics, we can agree that modernity had simply reached a point of saturated achievement, which could not grasp anything more and could no longer satisfy the needs of humanity, in terms of cutting edge technology or clear-cut open-mindedness. It is easier to talk about Gay Pride or about cultural issues in Nintendo Wii in postmodern terms, or by being "postmodernly" aware.

The idealistic structure of culture as a network of universals is virtually dismantled by postmodern critics, who sustain that knowledge, in the postmodern era, is gained by "putting into question existing paradigms, by inventing new ones, rather than assenting to universal truth or in agreeing to a consensus" (Best and Kellner, 1991, in Longhurst et al, 2008: 42). Lyotard (1979) suggests that, in the present context, the idea of metanarratives is obsolete, while the future rests in perspectives out of which the postmodern thinker collects only fragments, in order to rebuild something of its own. The idea of metanarratives is associated to postmodern critical theory and thought to be a comprehensive explanation of historical experience or knowledge. Or, as Aldea argues, it embodies a "set of rules saying who has the right and the responsibility to speak and who to listen in a given social group" (Aldea, 2000: 17).

Popular culture stands as a convergent factor between modernism and postmodernism, because it is directly related to the middle class social behavior and lifestyle. It is a postmodern watermark for art as a homogeneous entity, and yet it is the modernist manner in which we approach it and consume it. The middle class reached completion and gained influence in the industrial age. Today, we are witnesses and/or members of a new wave of middle class-ers: the yuppies (Young Urban Professional), the masses, the global villagers. In the post-industrial era, the masses relish in the PoMo environment with spectacular leisure activities, but respond to it in a purely modernistic way.

The postmodern condition as the context of the development of pastoral identity

How does all this influence the development of a pastor pertaining to the Christian faith? What challenges lie in facing the social implications of the postmodern experience?

Antal Bókay states that the postmodern does not acknowledge the existence of the self, the personal ego or the stable personal identity (Bókay, 2006:173). Thus the development of the pastor's personal identity could not happen in the postmodern frame. Despite all this, the contemporary pastors have to find themselves in this context and they have to strive for the stability of their personal and professional identity. Theological thought approaches postmodern theory in a manner in which it keeps its fair amount of distance. We shall analyze only a few aspects of the postmodern frame in which we search for the vectors that influence the identity development of pastors. Based on the work of Jan-Olav Henriksen and Hézsér Gábor, we shall present the process of globalization, individualization, contextualization, deconstruction and the compression of time and space all viewed through the prism of our goal, namely that of understanding the processes and contextual elements that determine any kind of self-identification.

Based on our analysis presented earlier, globalization essentially means the disappearance of borders and it makes the free flow of goods – both material and in the realm of thought – possible. Information becomes accessible in a blink of an eye, and knowledge receives a status of power in postmodern thought (Bókay, 2006: 172). The pastors of our age have to find a firm standing point from which they are able to take a stance beside or against the postmodern way of life. The constant shifting of these points bears the possibility of trial and turmoil for pastors faced with the necessity of self-identification. Where does this personal turmoil find its roots? Firstly the pastor has to decide whether he is for or against the new way of life so pertinently advertised by the postmodern media and reality. Secondly he has to find a position to deal with the world in which classic forms of social interaction are being reshaped through new ideals of nonconformist moral fiber.

The notion of individualization has a huge impact on the identity development of the pastor. Its meaning conveys a new way of shaping our personal lives free of all conventions. The imperative of social norms becomes all the dimmer until the point in which it disappears totally. The widespread application of the ideal of individualization analyzed from the pastor's point of view may represent a threat to his healthy identity development. Firstly he cannot expect to do his work in an environment in which a system of norms and values are set fast. Secondly through the relativity of assessing actions and behavior his status as beacon of moral norm is dispersed. The feeling of being a part of a community and having to respect the rules that govern said community, vanish. Thus being a part of the Christian community loses some of its meaning in

the sense that the individual does not feel that any kind of community-norm should be applicable to him. This way he becomes an individual who views a community as being a threat to his own individuality. The pastor is faced with this fact on two different levels. Firstly as an outside observer, when he views the community's members as becoming more and more individualistic. Secondly he feels the same opposing forces working within him and he experiences this state of mind as a source of internal conflict and stress. Coping with such a situation is often unbearable to some, even more so when one's identity is still in the process of molding.

Contextualization and deconstruction are similar notions due to the fact that they both operate in the realm of relativity (Hassan, 2000). In case of the former notion all aspects of behavior, decision making and opinion-forming have a reference point in the things that happen at the moment in a given context. They do not follow rules or guidelines set forth by norms accepted by the majority, rather conform themselves to context. The later notion that of deconstruction basically means the automatic questioning of all facts that had been prior accepted as being true. Deconstruction involves the process of stripping all new experiences and factual encounters of their status and place in a given system, and forming a new order in which they are able to exist.

The compression of time and space can be easily presented through the words of Antal Bókay, who states the following: „Two hundred years ago people could travel with 20-30 km/h. In the beginning of the 20th century the speed grew to 60-80 km/h. The 40's brought another speed-up, and soon people could travel with 300-400 km/h reaching 800-1000 km/h in a few short decades.” This is a basic example of the compressing of time and space. In the process of identity development in the case of pastors this means that they have to work with people who get in contact with all parts of the world in a blink of an eye. The members of the congregation get acquainted with new ideologies, systems of faith, and mentalities. The pastor has to be prepared to do an apologetic work if necessity arises in a context where temporal and spatial limitations grow ever more insignificant.

Conclusions

How can a pastor cope with the expectations of postmodern life? This depends on the measure in which his personal and professional identity have been consolidated, the manner in which he had learnt to create harmony between the two parallel scenes of these lines of development. As a conclusion we may state that the postmodern way of life in its essence means a context in which Christian pastors are forced to analyze the world they live in, they are compelled to find stable points of reference in a world which does not believe in them anymore. Postmodernism and postmodernity means that the pastors have to become aware of the fact that the sacral spheres are under constant scrutiny, and thus the pastors are the ones who have an innate moral obligation to act as safeguards in a world where nothing is malicious, only contextualized, everything is permitted, given we find the right mode of explaining it. A pastor in the postmodern has to be a symbol of the transcendent but in the meanwhile he also has to be tangible, reachable and approachable. He has to raise his voice against sin and ill thought but he has to do so in a way in which he does not offend anyone's right to individualization. He is torn between his calling and the new norms of the world. Whether he can cope with the chryses born by this ambivalence remains a question for further research.

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