

The Pastor in a Secular Age Book Study

Week 3 – Chapters 5-8

Introduction

This week we will have a webinar.

Summary

In Chapter 5 Andy turns to Jonathan Edwards and traces the change that he calls “when *What* becomes *How*” in two ways. The first is an affirmation of ordinary life, a logical consequence of the priesthood of all believers. The second is a shift in the basis of morality from conformity within a divine order to individual expression of desire that doesn’t interfere with another or judge another. The next chapter, 6, looks at Henry Ward Beecher, the 19th century celebrity preacher who turns towards personality. Where Edwards made everyone strive to be a priest, Beecher becomes the pastor who makes the Gospel come to everyone as laypeople, ministers included. Fosdick, the most prominent pastor in the early 20th century, ushers in the end of denominations and begins the move towards the therapeutic. Finally, Rick Warren fully embraces a new age of authenticity, challenging pastors to embrace an entrepreneurial identity to meet the felt needs of a society seeking fulfilment.

Key Quotes and Ideas

Closed spin – A Taylor term that Andy explains as “a construal of life bound in an immanent frame that blinds us to divine action. In other words, it is the presumption that there is no divine action in the world” (90). This is in contrast to an open immanentism, which can result in the nova effect (multiple ways of seeing transcendence).

Romanticism – First found on page 102, this is a philosophic movement most associated with the embrace of the non-rational part of human life such as passion and emotions; the age of authenticity will use Romantics as resources against highly rational forms of faith and understanding the world.

Neat summary : “It takes disenchantment [Beckett], inwardness [Augustine], a buffered self [Augustine], an affirmation of ordinary life [Edwards], and a modern moral order [Beecher] to produce the possibility that some could herald unbelief and not be ostracized or burned at the stake” (112).

Ancient Regime	Mobilization	Authenticity
Augustine, Beckett	Edwards, Beecher, Fosdick	Warren
Paleo	Neo	Post

Durkheim: significant sociologist who described the *function* of religion in a society rather than its formal beliefs or what people said about religion; sports can *function* as a religion (have rituals, bring meaning etc.) even though no one believes that Gretzky is God

“The ancient regime assumed that religious life was history in whole. The age of mobilization shifts this to assume that religion is (just) *part* of your history ... a post-Durkheimian age

religion would be completely severed from people's conceived history, fading into one's individualized and completely buffered sense of the self as a completely self-chosen identity" (131-132).

Relating to Real Life

Do you, like Nadia Bolz-Weber, reject "the image of the pastor as polite and mannered" (87)? Does this indicate a rejection of *what* and acceptance of *how*?

"A rude child revealed undevout parents—the rot was the child's rudeness, but the moisture that made it possible was undedicated, distracted parents. Your duty, and therefore the first place you lived out how of your deeds, was in marriage and family" (91). Do pastors continue to feel this but lack the ability to call anyone else on it?

"No longer seen as part of a denomination, the church could freely be seen as a resource. But what legitimates a resource, particularly in the age of authenticity and its post-Durkheimian dispensation, is *growth* or the number of people using it (for us this has evolved, with online tools, to likes, views, and retweets)" (139). Does this focus on growth speak to a malaise that you see in the pastoral identity?

Agree or Disagree

We hear many different explanations for the spiritual-but-not-religious. Andy offers one – "People all over our culture say, "I don't need to go to church, take communion, or care about baptism; that's not *what* I do. I think what matters is *how* you live your life, and I live mine spiritually" (82). Does this make sense to you?

"This is why the most heated fighting happens inside the denomination, threatening to tear it apart. I have identified with the denomination, willing to be part of it, but if it no longer connects with my own identity or, worse, feels like a violation of it, then I'll need to leave for a denomination that more clearly connects with my identity (including my understanding of my practices like reading Scripture). Or I could mobilize a group within the existing denomination to take it over, shifting it to more readily fit something people like me can identify with" (134). Can Root's analysis using Durkheim adequately explain the conflict so many denominations have faced over human sexuality?

Relating to Ministry

"Henry claimed that the pastor is to witness to divine action by personifying acceptance and friendship. It is the pastor's task, Henry believed, to run at the speed of intimacy" (103). Is it a surprise that Beecher had multiple affairs with women? Should ministers strive to be friends with their congregation?

"People's affiliation with their denomination had every sense of being free, but nevertheless it was often stable because it was central piece of your collective historical identity" (131). In terms of pastoral identity, how important is denominational affiliation in our contemporary context?

Lingering Questions

Edwards and Ward Beecher were both New England Calvinists (although quite different kinds) and even Fosdick was an east coast Presbyterian to start. Do we think that other theological traditions, like Methodists, have the same kind of trajectory? What do we make of Warren's Southern Baptist roots?

Andy takes his cue from Taylor's *A Secular Age* which emphasizes changes in time. Could it also be true that the book could be *A Secular Place*? Think of the progression of pastors and their locales. (eg. p. 127)

Further Reading

Nadia Bolz-Weber, *The Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint*