

The Pastor in a Secular Age Book Study

Week 4 – Chapter 9

Summary

This chapter serves as a “bridge” between the genealogy of specific pastors in Part 1 and the more explicitly theological proposal in Part 2. The bridge gives an alternative take on the rise and challenges of pastoral power based on lectures that postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault gave. First Foucault establishes that the Israelite understanding of power centres on the pastoral. It has to do with a people on the move (not a territory), benefits the people (not self-aggrandizing), and cares for the individual within the community (not a cost-benefit analysis). This kind of leadership creates expectations but those expectations are frustrated by subsequent history, namely the rise of the secular age (although Foucault does not call it that). Pastoral power faces the expectation of *analytic responsibility* (knowing and caring for each person), *exhaustive and instantaneous transfer* (the (de)merits of the people pass to the pastor), *alternate correspondence* (the need for continual reform), and *sacrificial reversal* (the pastor is in need of pastoring as well). Andy argues that the idea of pastoral power is rooted in God’s action which the secular age cuts us off from thus creating expectations that no one can meet.

Key Quotes and Ideas

Again, Andy will contrast “ontology” with “epistemology”. This is the contrast of being and knowing. Older forms of life (the enchanted for instance) focused on being. Spiritual power could be in an object. Modern, more secular, forms of life focus on knowing. How can we know that God is or is not present? Foucault focuses a great deal on epistemology but is tracing the absence of being as well.

“ministry” and “divine action” are actual events that occur in time and space. God is not an idea that we might know but is a personal agent who acts. There is, of course, a relationship between being and knowing. We know God in God’s action. Andy will give further description to that action in Part 2 but is already hinting at some of it here.

Relating to Real Life

After reading this chapter it might be helpful to go back and re-read something like Psalm 23. Or, if you are more ambitious, look at the transition from Judges to Saul to David to Solomon. In what ways is power understood?

Agree or Disagree

Are you surprised to hear a form of “servant leadership” emerge from reading Foucault?

Relating to Ministry

When you consider how power is structured in your congregation and denomination, how do you see vestiges of a pastoral paradigm at work?

Lingering Questions

The role of Jesus Christ in relation to the Old Testament will continue to be something that Andy will have to wrestle with. How is the divine action of God found in the Old Testament at once the same and new within the New Testament?

Further Reading

Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France* (New York: Picador, 2007)