Christian Identity in a Secular World

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Abstract:
This paper intends to argue for the necessity to preserve the Christian identity in the secular world, in which the believer is called to live in. The manifestation of this identity is seen especially in the area of ethics. It is analysed the way ethics is interpreted in postmodernism and in Christianity. On the one hand, the postmoderns want to equalize the biblical perspective on ethics, which supports *the good and evil* antithesis. Stanley Hauerwas talks about differences between Christian and Postmodern perspective in the area of ethics. The reader is invited to compare the two systems of moral values, and come up with some conclusions. It is demonstrated that Christianity bases its morality on *Scripture*. On the other hand, the postmodern perspective allows all the voices in the society to support their own view. The author presents the actual tendency to ignore the classical values, such as good and evil. There is also a tendency to remove guilt. In this paper it is argued that from the biblical perspective of moral antithesis is rooted in creation. The sacred text argue that because man ignored the divine commandment from *Genesis* 2:16-17, he committed a moral action with dramatic consequences for all human race. The biblical books written by the so called "Deuteronomistic School", are guided by the central idea of "blessings and curses". By doing good, man is expected to be blessed, and by doing evil, he is expected to be punished.
Keywords: Christian, identity, *Scripture*, postmodernism, ethics

Introduction

The author of this paper intends to argue for the necessity to preserve the Christian identity in the secular world, in which the believer is called to live. It is said that there is a difference in the area of ethics between postmodern and biblical perspective. On the one hand, the postmodernism wants to equalize the biblical perspective on ethics, which supports the good and evil antithesis. Stanley Hauerwas talks about differences between Christian and Postmodern view in the area of moral principles. Christian community struggles to find solutions to preserve the Christian identity. Therefore, we are invited to compare the two systems of moral values, and come up with some conclusions in supporting the position we chose.

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It is demonstrated that Christianity bases its morality on Scripture, which is considered authoritative for behaviour. The Bible is taken as the text source for Christian morality (Mattison, III, 2017: 1). On the other hand, postmodern perspective promotes an open view about the sources people can use in order to formulate principles for moral behaviour. In this way, the society allows all the voices present in the community to express their own perspective.

There are presented the specific features of postmodern morality, in the light of Scripture, in order to guard against confusion in the area of morality. We may observe that in postmodernism, there is a tendency to eliminate the limits established by the Christian tradition concerning good and evil. One of the main figures of postmodernity, Julian Huxley proposed a dynamic concept of interpretating Christianity, in order that, we may avoid the traditional antithesis between good and evil, supported by the biblical text. In this way people may remove guilt experienced, based on the Christian Bible.

If we analyse the origins of creation, we will observe that the biblical perspective about moral antithesis, is rooted in the creation narrative. The author of Genesis says that because man ignored the divine commandment from Genesis 2: 16-17, he committed a moral action with dramatic consequences for all human race. After that moment, humanity finds herself in a fallen state, as a consequence of rebellion against God's commandment. The bible books written by the so called "Deuteronomistic School", are guided by the central idea of "blessings and curses". Therefore, by doing good, man is expected to be blessed, and by doing evil, he is expected to be punished.

Morality in Postmodernism

Speaking about the roots of postmodernism, Graham Ward the editor of *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, informs us that Baroque and Culture Weimar of 1920 are considered protopostmoderns, and writers like Rabelais, Malarme, Kierkegaard, and of course Nietzsche are classified also as protopostmodern (Ward, 2005: xiv). In this paper we will try to show that postmodernism wants to equalize the traditional antithesis in ethics. The fact that postmodernity rejects antithesis in ethics is demonstrated by its tendency to equalize the dualism supported by the modernism. Such dualisms as: public-private, reason-passion, universal-particular, nature-culture, object-subject, collapsed in Postmodernism (Ward, 2005: xix-xx).

Our idea is supported also by Gavin D'Costa, who asks himself, if there is possible to speak about Ethics in postmodernism. The title of his

book is illustrative in this sense: "Postmodernity and Religious plurality: Is a Common Global Ethic Possible or desirable?"[1].

We may observe that there are differences of opinion between the traditional Christian perspective and the postmodern perspective on ethics. Stanley Hauerwas talks about differences between Christianity and Postmodernism[2]. In the same line, Myron Penner illustrates this difference, by presenting several perspectives on Christianity and Postmodernity (Penner (ed), 2005: 237). And Walter J. Lowe[3] comes with a new version for the actual Christian Theology. He entitled his article: "Prospects for a Postmodern Christian Theology: Apocalyptic Without Reserve".

In this period, there are serious attempts to re-write theology. Stephan Van Erp and André Lascaris edited a volume, in which some Dutch theologians, try to implement Christianity in our postmodern world. They named their volume: "Who is afraid of postmodernism?: challenging theology for a society in search of identity" (Van Erp, 2005: 8-9).

Kyle Roberts, proposes a comparison between Kierkegaard perspective of Christianity and the Emergent Christianity, in order to help Christians to discover how to implement Christianity in Postmodernism (Roberts, 2013: 30).

Therefore we are entitled to evaluate the way ethics are perceived in the clasical Christianity and in Postmodernism.

Differences in approaching ethics

On the one hand, the postmodern mentality seeks to promote certain moral values, shared by Christianity, with more passion than they were promoted even by the traditional Christian community. By doing this, we observe a tendency to attenuate the importance of Christian community in promoting moral values.

On the other hand, postmodernism seeks to change certain moral values found in the traditional Christianity, demonstrating that the new moral system of values increases human comfort and freedom, which were restricted in Christianity.

In this way there is a tendency to give up Christian values, and adopt the values of postmodernism, on the supposed superiority of the

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[1] See the chapter writen by D'Costa, with this title, "Postmodernity and Religious Plurality: Is a Common Global Ethic Possible or Desirable?" in the book of Graham Ward ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 131 ff.

[2] This is illustrated by the chapter *The Christian Difference or Surviving Postmodernism* in the book of Graham Ward ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 144 ff.

[3] See Walter J. Lowe, *Modern Theology*, from *Prospects for a Postmodern Christian Theology: Apocalyptic Without Reserve,* in philosophical research online, 5 (1), 1999, p. 17-24, in http://philpapers.org/rec/LOWPFA.

moral system promoted by the later. Therefore, we propose to compare the two systems of moral values, and come up with convincing arguments to support the position that we chose. As we know, Christianity bases its morality on Scripture, which is considered normative for every believer. The Bible is considered the ultimate source for morality.

On the other hand, postmodernism promotes an open view about the sources people can use in order to formulate principles for moral behaviour, allowing to all the voices from the human society to expresses their own perspective, including morality. We will observe that this tendency has a good motivation, trying to promote tolerance. However, this tolerance going in extremes, may ultimately lead to confusion in the area of morality.

In the following pages, we will present some specific features of postmodern morality, through the prism of Scripture, in order to avoid confusion in the area of morality.

Antithesis and Postmodernism
The antithesis can be defined as the contrast between the two phenomena, such as: joy, sorrow, good-evil, etc. We observe in postmodernism, a tendency to eliminate the limits established by the biblical text, in the area of good and evil.

One of the main figures of postmodernity, Julian Huxley proposed a dynamic concept of interpretating Christianity, in order that, we may get rid of the antithesis, between good and evil, which is supported by the classical Christianity (Thomas Henry Huxley, 1947: 135; see also Julian Huxley, 1957: 197).

On the other hand, Christianity claims that moral behavior depends mainly on knowing and practicing certain moral values. In this manner it is possible acquiring real knowledge.

Jesus stated this idea in John 7: 17. He says that "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own". From the New Testament perspective, when somebody is ready to apply the moral principles from the biblical text, he will be able to discern the falsity from truth. This means that, by acting in conformity with the moral principles from the Scripture, somebody can avoid confusion.

Another argument of postmoderns, against maintaining the antithesis between good and evil, is that it inoculates the sentiment of guilt in the life of a person. The tendency to improve the material and spiritual common good of the people, does not fit with the sentiment of guilt. Therefore postmodernism is struggling to remove guilt.

To a certain extent, the concern for removing guilt is a natural one. However, the explanation given by postmodern thinking may be questioned, because it affirms that human failures are not their own responsibility, but they are the consequences of a metaphysical problem. Postmodernism holds that man is not responsible for the evil or for the good he commits. If a man does some things classified as evil, they have to be interpreted as a fabrication problem. Man was created from the start with certain drawbacks, which he has to accept as unavoidable.

For example, the Marquis De Sade, supported chemical determinism theory, regarding the creation of man. As a result he promoted the dictum: "All that is created is good, because what somebody does belongs to this world, which God declared good" (Airaksinen, 2002: 17, see also Phillips, 2005: 38). He thus eliminates the antithesis between good and evil. We know that his ideology served to excuse his brutal behaviour. We cannot take the model promoted by De Sade in implementing the moral system of our society.

Speaking about the source of failures of man in the present, Francis Schaeffer observes that, because the new theology rejects the moral antithesis, and because for its followers, sin and guilt, are, finally a metaphysical problem (a design problem – independent of man) (Schaeffer, 1992: 136.), it would mean that man has always been in this fallen condition. This is not his fault, but the fault of the one who created him. Therefore sin, depravity are the responsibility of the Creator not man's.

From the perspective of postmodern theology, man's failures are not a moral problem, which could consider man responsible for his actions s. Schaeffer argues that for this reason postmodern theologians promote an implicit or explicit universalism, with reference to man's salvation. They say that eventually all people will be saved. In his view, he says that it would be naïve to believe that this universalism is only one isolated case in the neo-orthodox thinking. Because they do not support a moral antithesis between good and evil, there can be no real moral guilt for individual.

In this case the doctrine of justification (the need for man's rehabilitation by God), makes no sense and ultimately no one will be condemned (Schaeffer, 1992: 136).

It is no wonder that the French poet Baudelaire reaches a shocking conclusion with respect to the identity of God. He says: "If there is a God, he is the devil", because he is responsible for the sins of man, and for his evil behaviour. God had created man with this shortcoming (Schaeffer, 1992: 136).

A biblical perspective about antithesis
On the other hand, the Scripture clearly states that the mistakes man makes, have a moral cause. Man is responsible for the evil he is doing. In

Genesis 2: 16-17, the author informs us that God has forbidden man for eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. "The LORD God commanded the man, «You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of *good and evil*, for when you eat of it you will surely die»".

The biblical text asserts that, from the beginning, God had confronted man, with the moral antithesis of good and evil. The adjective translated in the Bible as "good" in the original Hebrew is *tob*. It has the idea of selecting what is preferable, out of the two possibilities (Gen 29: 19; Exo 14: 12; Jon 4: 3), something good, pleasant (cf., Num 14: 7; Est 1: 11; Psa 52: 9), profitable (cf., Gen 2: 18; Zec 11: 12), something morally right, opposed to something evil (cf., Gen 2: 17; Lev 27: 14; Psa 37: 27), something appropriate (cf., Deu 1: 14; 1Sa 1: 23; Psa 92: 1). The adjective has the idea of happiness, wellbeing (Deu 6: 24; Ecc 2: 24).

God said about all the things he created, that were very good. "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good והנה־טוב מאד. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day (Genesis 1: 31).We have here a culmination of the antithesis: "very good".

However, this verse can be used also as a counter argument against the moral antithesis. Because man belongs to this created order, which was declared to be very good, we may say that man has no moral problem.

In fact, Marquis de Sade by promoting determinism, argues that everything created is good, including violence. Hence the name 'sadism'. However, the community condemned this perspective. Therefore the books of Marquis de Sade, were prohibited for the public reading, until the twentieth century. Currently they are being studied by researchers. They became a source of research in postmodernism[4].

But the narrative of creation does not stop at Genesis 1: 31. It continues with the chapter 3: 1șu, from which we learn that man ignored the divine commandment. In this way, he committed a moral action with dramatic consequences for all human race. He acted wrongly from a biblical point view.

The Hebrew word translated with the adjective "evil" is רע ra, which can be translated by "evil" in a moral sense. It is used in antithesis with the adjective "good." Evil describes fully and completely its meaning when used in reference to the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2: 9; Gen 3: 5, Gen 3: 22).

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[4] We foud out 486,000 entries only at the subject about "Marquis De Sade – All that was created is good".

There are many places in which the word is used in the Old Testament. We will present some instances in which the adjective is used. It refers to the bad quality stuff, like in Pharaoh's dream (Genesis 41: 3, Gen 41: 20, Gen 41: 27). Also, poisoned water is considered bad (2Ki 2: 19; 2Ki 4: 41). In Israel, kings had to discern between good and evil (Ecc 12: 14); People are classified as bad (1Sam 30: 22; Esther 7: 6; Jer 2: 33). Genesis says that the heart of man is evil (Gen 6: 5, Gen 8: 21); God requires of His people to purge the evil from among them (Deu 17: 7). He ultimately decides what is right and wrong (Deu 9: 18; 1Ki 2: 22 ș.u.). The word can be used as a general negative attribute. We read that the psalmist is not afraid of evil (Psalm 23: 4). The people of Israel are declared bad, in order that Aaron justify himself (Exo 32: 22). Disasters, failures are all interpreted as consequences of evil.

As we could observe, the Scripture stresses the moral antithesis between good and evil. The Good and the Evil are clearly defined here. The bible books written by the so called "Deuteronomistic School"[5], are guided by the central idea concerning: "The blessings and curses". The reader is informed also about the consequences which follow if somebody does good or evil. By doing good, he is expected to be blessed, and by doing evil, people are expected to be punished.

Conclusion

In this paper we intended to observe the necesity to preserve the Christian identity in the secular world, in which the believer is called to live. We saw that It is said that there are differences between postmodernism and traditional Christianity, in the area of ethics. On the one hand, the postmodernism intends to relativize the biblical perspective on ethics. In this way it is contested the moral antithesis between good and evil.

We saw that Stanley Hauerwas talks about differences between Christianity and Postmodernism in the area of morality. In order to preserve the Christian identity, Kyle Roberts proposes the concept of Emergent Christianity, in order to help Christians to implement Christianity in Postmodernism. Therefore, we are invited to compare the two systems of moral values, in order to come up with right conclusions, in this area.

We saw that Christianity bases its morality on Scripture, which is considered normative for the community. The Bible is considered as the ultimate source for morality. On the other hand, postmodernism, promotes an open view about the sources people can use in order to

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[5] The hipothesis of the "Deuteronomistic School" is questioned by Mark A. O'Brien, *The Deuteronomistic History Hypothesis: A Reassessment*, Gottingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989.

formulate principles for moral behaviour, in order to allow all the voices from the society to express their own perspective about morality. We discovered some specific features of postmodern morality, which may help us avoid confusion in this area.

There is a tendency in postmodernism to eliminate the limits between good and evil, established by traditional Christianity. As we saw, Julian Huxley proposed a dynamic concept of interpretating Christianity, in order that, we may avoid antithesis, between good and evil, supported by the classical Christianity. In this way the postmoderns are struggling to remove guilt.

On the other hand we saw that from the biblical perspective, moral antithesis is rooted in creation. We are informed that man ignored the divine commandment from Genesis 2: 16-17. In this way he committed a moral transgression, with dramatic consequences humanity. Following this moment, the state of man is classified as fallen. A whole section of biblical books from the Old Testament, named books written by the so called "Deuteronomistic School", are structured around the moral idea of "blessings and curses". By doing good, man is expected to be blessed, and by doing evil, he is expected to be punished. In conclusion, we observed that the antithesis developed by the books of Scripture, is central for classifying man's behaviour.

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