

BABES – BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ – NAPOCA
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THESIS

ABSTRACT

CRISIS IN THE LIFE AND IDENTITY OF GREEK CATHOLIC
PASTORS WHO WORK IN PROVIDING HELP FOR PEOPLE IN
THEIR COMMUNITY

Scientific coordinator:

Prof. Univ. Dr. LÉSZAI LEHEL

PhD:

Makkai László

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ABSZTRAKT

LELKIPÁSZTORI KRÍZIS ÉS IDENTITÁSVÁLSÁG A SEGITŐ
SZOLGÁLATBAN TEVÉKENYKEDŐ GÖRÖGKATOLIKUS
LELKÉSZEK ÉLETÉBEN

Témavezető:

Prof. Univ. Dr. Lészai Lehel

Doktorandus:

Makkai László

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Table of contents

Preface

Introduction

1 Theory

1.1 The conceptualization of crisis theology

1.1.1 Introduction

1.1.2 Biblical teachings on crises

1.1.3 The sacrament of penance as the medicine of crisis

1.1.4 The reflection of the Emmaus disciples detected on people in crisis

1.1.5 „Jesus prayer”, the interior prayer of the Eastern Church – as the form of internal contemplation

1.1.6 Approaching crisis through the focus faith

1.1.7 Summary

1.2 The review of relevant scientific literature

1.2.1 The psychological background of crisis

1.2.2 Short review of the development of the psychology of crisis

1.2.3 The stages of crisis based on the model of Selye

1.2.4 The psychological effects of chronic crisis

1.2.5 Unique features of different individuals' stages of crisis

1.2.6 Physiological symptoms of crisis

1.2.7 Types of crisis

1.2.8 Crisis from the point of view of pastoral psychology

1.2.9 Spiritual crisis in a pastor's life

1.2.10 Self-awareness and spirituality

1.2.11 Stages of coping strategies and their consequences

1.2.12 Summary

1.3 The psychological background of priests / pastors who provide help for those who are in need

1.3.1 Introduction

1.3.2 The essence of priesthood on the basis of Biblical context

- 1.3.3 The features of clerical spirituality
- 1.3.4 The risks and critical areas of the development of clerical self-identity
- 1.3.5 Adequacy for the vocation of priesthood in the light of the personal calling
- 1.3.6 An overlook on the situation of the Roman Catholic and the Greek Catholic Church in Hungary
- 1.3.7 The situation of the Greek Catholic Clergy in Hungary
- 1.3.8 Positive examples of pastoral work
- 1.3.9 Summary

1.4 The development of pastors' / priests' identity in the light of the challenges of the modern age

- 1.4.1 Introduction
- 1.4.2 The role of closure in identity formation during adolescence in the healthy development of pastoral life
- 1.4.3 The four types of identity crisis
- 1.4.4 Summary

1.5 Identity and faith

- 1.5.1 Introduction
- 1.5.2 The phenomenology of the protestant theology
- 1.5.3 Problems faced during adolescence from the point of view of faith and identity crisis
- 1.5.4 The symptoms of adolescent crisis
- 1.5.5 The mechanisms of adolescence
- 1.5.6 The crises of young adulthood in the context of faith and identity
- 1.5.7 Summary

1.6 Crises pastors face

- 1.6.1 Life circumstances that cause crisis in a pastor's life
- 1.6.2 The possibilities of successful coping in a pastor's work
- 1.6.3 Differentiated levels of finding ways of coping with crisis
- 1.6.4 Defining the awareness of being called and its crisis

1.7 The definition and significance of burnout and stress syndrome in the life of priests / pastors who provide help for those who are in need

- 1.7.1 Introduction
- 1.7.2 The causes of burnout syndromes in the different stages of a pastor's life and work

- 1.7.3 The stages of burnout
- 1.7.4 The relations of burnout and mechanisms of defence
- 1.7.5 The role of stress and its manifestations in a pastor's life
- 1.7.6 The development and definition of stress
- 1.7.7 The effects of stress on the body
- 1.7.8 The adaptation syndrom according to Selye
- 1.7.9 The relations between burnout and stress
- 1.7.10 Stress in the life of a pastor
- 1.7.11 Summary

2 Crises in the marriage of pastors and their possible solving mechanisms

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Marriage in the context of theology
 - 2.2.1 The teachings about marriage in the Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic Church
 - 2.2.2 Guidances for marriage during engagement preparation
 - 2.2.3 The steps of the sacrament of marriage
 - 2.2.4 Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference: Letter about families
 - 2.2.5 The teaching of the Eastern Churches about sacramental marriages
 - 2.2.6 The changes in the cycles of life in the family
 - 2.2.6.1 Role conflicts of a young couple
 - 2.2.6.2 Conflicts in families upbringing little children
 - 2.2.6.3 Challenges in families with school children
 - 2.2.6.4 Permanent conflicts in families with adolescents
 - 2.2.6.5 Identity crisis in families where young adults leave the family
 - 2.2.6.6 The problem of midlife crisis
 - 2.2.6.7 The beginning of the last stages of life
 - 2.2.7 The pastor and his family in the context of life cycles

3 The development of faith in the perspective of a pastor's identity

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Stages of faith
 - 3.2.1 James W. Fowler: Stages of faith
 - 3.2.2 The stages of faith according to Richard Niebuhr
 - 3.2.3 The stages of faith according to Jálícs Ferenc Jesuit priest

- 3.2.4 The consonance of the stages of faith with the revelation
- 3.3 The notion of faith in the Bible
 - 3.3.1 Faith in the Old testament
 - 3.3.1.1 Faith in the context of Abraham's story
 - 3.3.1.2 The faith of Moses and other prophets
 - 3.3.2 Faith in the New testament: following Jesus
 - 3.3.2.1 Faith in the New testament
 - 3.3.2.2 Faith after Easter: Acts
 - 3.3.2.3 St Paul, the apostle of faith
 - 3.3.2.4 St John Apostle
 - 3.3.3 The faith of a child as a primitive stage of the development of faith
 - 3.3.4 Summary

4 The reserach

- 4.1 Summary
- 4.2 Theses
 - 4.2.1 Justification of the theses
 - 4.2.2 The hypotheses of the dissertation
 - 4.2.3 The research
 - 4.2.4 The interviews
 - 4.2.5 The influence of theological studes on the identity of a pastor
 - 4.2.6 Protestant pastors' summarizing opinion on their theological studies
 - 4.2.7 Catholic priests summarizing opinion on their theological studies
 - 4.2.8 The formation of a pastor's identity in the early years of their service
 - 4.2.9 The comparison of the crises in professions aiming to provide help for others
- 4.3 The indirect impression of the marriages of pastors based on the reasearch
 - 4.3.1 Crises of marriages in the life of pastors
 - 4.3.2 Parental role in the marriages of pastors
 - 4.3.3 The disfunctional marriage in the life of pastors having families
 - 4.3.4 The characteristic features of marriages of pastors
 - 4.3.5 Latent conflicts of marriages of pastors: reformed pastors
 - 4.3.6 Latent conflicts of marriages of pastors: Greek Catholic priests
 - 4.3.7 Experiences of pastoral marriages functioning adaptively

5 Finding a way out of crisis and possible solutions

5.1 Presenting models aiming to aid clerical persons

5.1.1 The Minnesota model

5.1.2 Complex program based on the Guest House Model

5.2 Practical program of prevention aiming to save marriages of pastors

5.2.1 The program of marriage preparation for theologians

5.2.2 Retreats, meetings of prayer, thematic days

5.2.3 Parish visitations by the dean

5.2.4 Council of presbyteras

5.2.5 Young pastors' regular visitations and monitoring

5.2.6 The foundation of Greek Mint House

6 The evaluation of the hypotheses

7 Summary

8 Summary in English

Table of contents

Church documents

Appendix

Acknowledgements

KEY WORDS

pastoral, psychology, crisis, identity, vocation, faith, marriage, spirituality, qualification, suitability

INTRODUCTION

Crisis psychology is not a distinct discipline of psychology, yet it has become an important field of psychology which focuses on the whole human being and influences everyday life.

In my thesis I am dealing with this phenomenon of psychology focusing on those mental processes which may have a destructive effect on people providing help for others. During the past few decades a number of studies and dissertations have analyzed similar issues besides examining general mental state. People during working in their profession often experience mental effects such as burnout, traumas or other syndromes.

My special field of interest is crisis in a pastor's life. I conducted more the one hundred interviews with pastors, Greek Catholic pastors and from other denominations as well. Pastors face a serious mental workload. Compulsion to conform, duties to perform, conflicts in the communities and not being able to handle these conflicts properly have a significant influence on one's repressed, subconscious part of the mind.

In my thesis my intention is to present the reasons for and the process of getting into crisis through the interviews and examining domestic and international studies, and above this to suggest possible solutions for individuals and dioceses

With my thesis I intend to make the first step as a Greek Catholic priest to examine this field and be at disposal for those who need it.

THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of my thesis has been to present what forms of crisis pastors / priests face and might provide them help to overcome these. In general pastors rarely seek help and find it hard to do so from their superiors because they believe it is the sign of weakness or show them unsuitable. Already during their years of being a theologian, they experienced that not the cooperative coping strategies were at present but personal solutions. Superiors see the

sacrament of penance as the only way for coping, however, this sacrament does not necessarily give the fully satisfactory help needed.

My commitment is unquestionable in this field, since my intention is to reverse the general belief that one can only depend on themselves. I am determined to present pastors new ways and methods which show them that with the assistance of experts they are able to find real solutions when they are in crisis, both in their work and their private life. I believe this program must appear in faculties of theology, where theologians can be taught the importance of cooperations with other experts who work in providing help (such as psychologists, psychiatrists, family therapists, doctors). My aim is to change the approach and aid the improvement of problem solving abilities corresponding with the realities of the modern world. I based the statements of my thesis on these assumptions and with my research I intend to justify or disprove them.

I would like to point out that in Hungary no other dissertations focused on these topics, and I wish to continue exploring this field on the dioceses.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

First part: Theory

We do not encounter the phrase 'crisis' on the pages of the Old and New Testament. Not even its synonyms such as depression or recession can be found. However, seeing the life and struggle of the people in the Bible raises our awareness that men of God were also exposed to mental traumas, depression and crisis. Sickness is also present, which often means a state of crisis, 169 references are included. Suffering of innocent people is in the focus as well on several occasions, such as Joseph (Gen, 47), Prophet Elijah (1 Kings), Prophet Habakkuk (Habakkuk), and by all means Job (Job).

The word 'crisis' comes from Greek and means 'turning point' or 'decision'. According to Caplan being in crisis is a state when people face such obstacles that cannot be overcome with their already-existing problem-solving strategies. It also has to be emphasized that theology has its part in researching crisis. As Hézser points out it is a human's basic

characteristic to search the meaning of their existence and there is a constant risk of losing the meaning that has been found.

Crisis is an ever-lasting struggle, which is a burden on the harmony of one's body and soul. Losing the balance in life is always a threat. And since crisis is an abruptive event, it is not possible to be thoroughly prepared. Even if it was possible to anticipate the event, it could not be prevented to lose balance to some extent. Everyone adjusts to crisis in a different way: some are able to find mental balance even after a serious illness, others can suffer from serious consequences after events that are considered less significant.

Second part: Marriage according to theology

In this part marriage and preparation for marriage in the church are examined. Marriage is a gift of God, founded by God as the strongest relationship of humans. On the sixth day of Genesis, God celebrated the first ceremony of marriage and united man and woman as equals in marriage.

The pastor and his family are always in the centre of their community, often seen as 'role models of family life', therefore their relationship and acts are considered as examples to follow. This role is definitely respectful, however, in their everyday life it might become a trigger for crisis because of the unrealistic expectations and the compulsion to conform. The community often expects the pastor to be a good husband, a good father, a stable source; expects the wife to be a good mother, devoted spouse and caring housewife who brings up clever and respectful children. This ideal picture does not allow any problems, conflicts or any special quality, which otherwise would be natural in the life of a family.

Third part: The development of faith in the pastor's identity

Faith is part of our humanity. Every human being believes in something or someone. In the Old Testament faith is man's answer to the loyalty of God, and means moving from the passive acceptance of God's words to active obedience. In the Synoptic Gospels of the New Testament the notion of faith appears with the healings and miracles of Jesus as a power that makes them possible to happen. According to John's Gospel faith allows us to go beyond what we can physically see and experience. Seeing and perceiving might provide us with the possibility to have faith, but those are blessed who do not see still believe (John 20:29) as opposed to Thomas apostle who believes because he sees. The tension between

activity and passivity is key in the Bible. Having faith like a child means unconditional trust when active participation is not needed. Only mature faith can integrate that salvation is by grace but at the same time acts are also needed because faith without works is dead (James 2:26).

Finally, if we study the psychological features of contemporary society, we realize that a regression solely to the faith of a child can be detected, which can be seen in primitive religious forms such as the world of myths and in the literature of New Age. People who live according to the rules of the Church are in an favourable situation since they can live according to clean source in the middle of a society which is confused in its faith.

Fourth part: The description of the research

I conducted my research between 2007-2020 with the aim of obtaining information regarding the everyday problems and struggles of pastors. Already in the early stages of my research I became aware of the fact that my colleagues were reluctant to share their experiences and crises although I was one of them. The reason for their reluctancy might have been their fear that I would share the information I gained to their superiors even though I ensured them strict confidence in each case. This might also be the reason why no such research has been carried out in Hungary before. I believe pastors need a broader knowledge of psychology and the ability to make use of the empirical results in their everyday practice.

Through my research I conducted interviews with 100 young priests and pastors to see what problems they have faced during their work so far. The interviewees have been working for not more than 15 years so they all are the pastors of the 21st century. Based on gender I interviewed 96 male and 4 female pastors. As for the denomination I contacted 70 Greek Catholic, 11 Roman Catholic, 10 Reformed, 5 Lutheran, 2 Adventist and 2 Baptist pastors. Except for the Roman Catholic priests, every pastor lived in marriage, therefore crisis regarding marriage was relevant in 88 cases.

Fifth part: Possible solutions and finding a way out of crisis

In my thesis I intended to present possibilities for finding a way to cope with crisis after making the diagnosis. From the broad choice of psychological tools a complex program might be carried out in a diocese, since the pastor himself is the most important.

In 2012 a crisis committee was founded in the Diocese of Hajdúdorog. The committee focuses on three fields (based on the reserach carried out by me):

1. Developing and maintaining a system supporting the theologians in their preparations for marriage (preventive)
2. Programmes for preserving and facilitating the marriages of pastors (operative)
3. Providing aid for pastors in crisis with the help of experts (cooperative)

THE HYPOTHESES OF THE RESEARCH

Hypothesis 1

Pastors are less likely to seek help than others neither from personal relations (family and friends) nor other pastors or superiors.

Hypothesis 2

Pastors in crisis are still able to perform their duties and which they see as a compensation for their personal problems.

Hypothesis 3

Pastors face similar types of crisis to other professionals whose work is to provide help for others.

Hypothesis 4

Pastors are inclined to use their profession to solve their own mental problems.

SUMMARY

It has been a great experience for me to carry out this work, although I faced several difficulties. The interviews were stimulating, and I have been honoured to have the opportunity to be an active participant in starting new programs. I believe my thesis is thorough, even though I identified new fields to explore while working on it, which means an inspiration at the same time.

The possible solutions I proposed might contribute to the development of the pastors' personality, having a positive influence on both their personal identity and their family life. If pastors see themselves well-prepared in their field and have the opportunity for professional development, they might work in a better-balanced way. They will become confident that the service they perform for God's call is something they do at their best knowledge and fulfill their duty persistently. They will feel confident, self-efficient, in control and have positive self-assessment, which are crucial for maintaining mental health. As a result pastors will feel more secure in their social relationships, have a more harmonical life with their spouses children and friends, and the possibility of a deepening crisis will be reduced.