Principles for Evaluating the Concept of Authority. The Tension Between the Christian-Conservative Perspective and Postmodernism

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ABSTRACT: In a society of globalization toward which the contemporary world is going, it has been noticed a certain tension between the old and the new, between what has already been consolidated as a Christian ideology, most of it conservative, and what has come after and has gained more and more territory in the contemporary culture. Identified as a culture or as an ideology of Postmodernism. Both ideologies disputed and assumed the claim of authority rather ultimate, from the beginning and even more when they came into contact with one another, trying thus to gain an advantage. From this point of view it has been noticed the need of evaluating this concept (of authority) from common grounds so that the results can be rightly appreciated and equidistant toward both ideologies. Thus, it is urgent to define well the notion of authority so that after this endeavor we are able to have a right appreciation of the validity of a certain ideology; "authority" is the concept that can bring a remarkable advantage on the field of ideas and values of life.

KEY WORDS: authority, Christian values, Postmodernism, principle, evaluation

Taking into account the ever widening discrepancy between the Postmodern ideology, with all its implications, in almost all the social and cultural spheres

of modern civilization, and the general Christian ideology, and especially the conservative side of it, there is an increasing need to have cogent approaches for analyzing the diversity of items that fall into the incidence of these lines of thinking; the purpose is to clear delineate their positive aspects from the negative ones or potentially destructive, especially on the medium or long term.

Thus, in the present article, our focus is to advance a few principles for evaluating the concept of authority, from the conservative Christian perspective as well as from the Postmodernism perspective, all the more present in culture and standing in opposition with the first one; the few principles that we advance must be present in the discourse of both ideologies. This present work will endeavor to stir an analysis and even an introspection far more honest than the opportunities or risks of assuming either one of the ideologies taken into consideration.

So, our approach is to analyze Postmodernism and Christianity according to the following four principles without pretending to have an exhaustive analysis:

- The source (origin) principle – we think that this is the most important principle because it is the decisive factor in assuming authority as a legitimate one by the community (Johnson 2007, 45); on this level, authority can be epistemic, deontic or both.
- The morality principle (competence and applicability) – is the icon of the excellence of an epistemic authority; it is an authority capable of articulating wishes, dogmas, and ideologies and supporting and materializing them.
- The stability (equilibrium) and continuity principle – stands for being able to maintain a community in a certain equilibrium, even if that means rearranging the power or influence centers in the community by assuming certain new values or concepts that will prove to be stable in time.
- The hierarchical principle – represents the manifestation of authority or the subordination before a higher authority; it is the principle that stands especially in cases of incertitude or of authority crisis, when an entity that assumes authority is not accepted.

1. Postmodernism Principles

Postmodernism is an intellectual, cultural and artistic epiphenomenon that does not necessarily represent a certain historical time, as it represents the present-day West, which gave up in some ways the euphoria of faith in progress that proved to be more wishful thinking that reality till now or in the present (Pop 2014, 277). It claims that morality, truth, beauty, social life, communities, families etc. do not have an objective or fixed existence; all there is a continuous flow of abstract models, conversations, representations or stories that can validate as true everyone of the personal appreciation toward the analyzed subject (Johnson 2007, 258-59).

Thus, the basic ideology of Postmodernism is total relativism, or rather the fact that there is no absolute or objective truth, the only absolute being that everything is relative, advancing in this way a subjective truth that denies the idea of metanarrative (all-inclusive assertions about the whole of reality), denning the concept of universal Truth (Noebel 2013, 153-54).

There is no sure date for the starting of Postmodernism, but most people that studied the phenomenon agree that it had "a long enough incubation period" (Dedu 2019, 65). So, the ideas embraced by thus new ideology have their roots in the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Karl Marx is the precursor of the ideas about the "new society" and the "new man", freed from economic exploitation and from the religious concept of a just God or of a better world in the eternal life to come (Henry 1999, 629). Marx claims that this life is the only one that needs to be taken into consideration, and for it to become a better one for the individual person, he must gain it through social violence and proletarian revolution, materialistic atheism being the basic ideology that must prepare the individual for such a violent change of society (Henry 1999, 629).

If Marx can be named the stepfather of Postmodernism, F. Nietzsche is its natural father. In respect to the economic Marxism supported by Marx, Nietzsche believes in cultural Marxism, attacking the supreme causality of morality, casting doubts on it, and suspecting it as a cause for "regress, some sort of peril, of deception, of a narcotic to live in the present based on the future" (Pop 2003, 154). In this logic, Nietzsche asserts that God is dead, and the

ideal of the man in the present is to become a superman - a god, himself being the morality and authority source and, also, he is the sufficiency of all things.

1.1. The Source (Origin) Principle

If Marx and Nietzsche created the frame of what will be named postmodern ideology about a half-century ago before its dawn, then the struggle between the classes, proletariat, and capitalists that have generated in Europa vast movements and social unrest represents the start of the new ideology. Going East toward Central Europe, the Marxist revolution generated real fears till the moment when it was halted by the Polish army in 1920.

This moment and this failure is used by a few Marxist intellectuals (Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukács, Erich Fromm, Wilhelm Riech, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse), who moved the struggle from the economic field (the orientation given by Marx) to the cultural revolution (according to Nietzsche' philosophy), they founded in 1923 in Germany the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt (known later as the School from Frankfurt), after the example of the soviet Institute Marx-Engels in Moscow (Raehn 2015, 27-31).

Thus, we think that the start and the origin of such an ideology lays in the intellectual, social, cultural, educational and artistic endeavors of the School from Frankfurt, even if these are based on older philosophical assertions from the XIX century, the growth of the phenomenon being the '60, the well known "cultural revolution" and from there it went "crescendo" till now.

So, according to the principle of the origins, the authority of the postmodern ideology is found in the intellectual endeavor of the great thinkers and philosophers of the XIX century, whose ideologies have been materialized by the intellectual from the School in Frankfurt, asserting its epistemic authority by the fact that it offered society a better and deeper understanding of the world view.

1.2. The Morality (Competence) Principle

With the failure of economic Marxism, the founders of the School in Frankfurt rightly identified the fact the present-day social man will not react according

to the expectations as long as his conscience will be bound to the Christian morality. Thus, the next logical step of the cultural Marxists was to deconstruct and to introduce a new literary hermeneutics (through the studies and research done by Jacques Derrida, the father of deconstructivism) meant to create a new mentality, a new morality and, implicitly, a new self consciousness (McDonald 2017, 57-69) because this is the only moral authority that the individual will never contest in himself (Pleșu 2017, 12-13).

The instrument used by the postmodernists to create or even impose a new morality on society is positively named" *political correctness*". In its name the fundamental entities of society are under attack and demolition: education, family, social and religious life, everything in order to rebuild new reference values to analyze the social ethos.

By resorting to the idea of the "free man" or of "man-god", they cancel the Christian ethic and morality, especially in the American-European sphere, building on the foundation of atheism a new ideology, based on the "omission of eternity" (Noebel 2013, 197-201). Continuing their endeavor, they deny then the existence of a universal moral reality, seeking to find a new standard for right and wrong, according to their world views.

Thus, through cultural deconstruction is induced the idea of a cultural relativism, in which morality is bound to smaller communities in which it works, being very dynamic, adapting and evolving, without a reference to the macro scale or to the meta-society, denning thus the direct relation between morality and Christian values. The result is the morals of marriage, abortion, sexual orientation or moral subordination to divinity, respectively God, are annihilated and in their place stands the complete relativism, ethical standards that are subjective and a limited morality (no individual or society can not decide what is good or bad for another individual or society (Noebel 2013, 197-201).

1.3. The Stability and Continuity Principle

The present concept seeks to identify a better certainty for authority. The higher the level of certainty of the one who assume for oneself such an authority, the deeper is his belief in the legitimacy of the "Sovereign". As

such, an authority that succeeds to demonstrate or at least to convince with strong arguments the stability and continuity of its leadership system, has a bigger impact on the conscience of a cultural and social community in a given geographical area.

According to Paraschiva Pop, who does a complex radiography of Nietzsche (the precursor of Postmodernism), this ideological stream has defined itself a long time after its appearance *only* in opposition with the Christian morals, its key words being *demolition, violence, suspicion, denial, regress* (Pop 2003, 153-60). Finishing this idea, Valentin Dedu, analyzing the work of Arnold Toynbee, *Study of History*, takes on his conclusion that the decadent societies, that is, those who failed in staying stable and continuous in their values and authority system, are characterized by "escaping the social problems by running to the world of entertainment (Dedu 2019, 65-66).

Going even further, Nietzsche wishes an amoral super-man (defined in opposition with the classic morality, based on Christianity), imaging a new being with the innocence of the animals, beyond the idea of good or bad. As such, he emphasizes the supreme value of the new man: power, domination and continuous accrual of force (Pop 2014, 263-68). All these aspects taken and analyzed together give us an overview that not even the postmodernists themselves did not imagined: if they imagine the "global village" in which every culture or social group sets its own moral standards, then the "law of the jungle" imagined by the strategists of the Postmodernism will lead to complete chaos, a world in each every individual fights according to his own rules (not accepted by the others) for the *alfa* position in any given society.

As such, eliminating the Judeo-Christian values from the power equation of the present-day meta-society, breaking up this society in minuscule cultures, with their own rules and morality, down to the level of the individual, practically represents the "proclamation of the lordship of *nothingness* [emphasis our]" (Rose 2013, 104-16). By a minimal effort of imagination, one can identify two major scripts for the postmodern society:

+ The first script is the optimistic one in which the members of all the communities affiliated to the "global village" will live with the perpetual illusion of a "new era" in the context in which the

hope of the human existence will end at the grave (as postulate the atheists, Marxists, nihilists and postmodernists).

- ⬧ The second script is the pessimistic one in which the postmodern ideologies will seize the human mind, conscience, values and morality in a such a measure that the initial meta-society will be broken up in more and smaller social cells, down to the individual, that, according to the new ideology, will resort to more power using more and more violent mechanism and methods, that will lead to an inevitable chaos and then, implicitly, will give way to a dictature (of any form of manifestation).

1.4. The Hierarchical Principle

Postmodernism, even from its beginnings, knew the reality that it would have to deal with an audience and a society deeply impregnated with the moral values of Christianity, historically inherited up till the present. Even in the modern epoch, society does not recognize the intervention of the divine, and the Christian ethos that leads the way, has kept untouched the values, morality and absolutes that emanates from these (Pop 2014, 233). In order to have a complete success, the postmodernist had to attack and destroy the ultimate level of authority: God Himself.

By attacking the existence of God, the hierarchy of the authority, as it was inherited till now, was canceled and, as such, in the new moral postmodern order man will no answer to anyone superior to himself. He will only submit to his own Ego.

Thus, for eroding the cultural conscience of the society, beginning in the XIX century philosophers such as Auguste Comte (the founder of positivism) and Friedrich Nietzsche have asserted with boldness in their writings, appealing to huge persuasive efforts, that God does not exist or, in the best case, he is "dead" (Pop 2014, 234-49). The ideas are taken almost unaltered by the members of the School in Frankfurt and clever promoted by the new mechanism of intellectual and cultural manipulation (for example, the concept of „political correctness") in the academics, where the illuminated minds of the new society were being formed (Cribb 2015, 47-48) and from there it have been easier and more credible to dissimulate them in the inferior "social classes".

Therefore, to satisfy the hierarchical principle, deep-seated in the cultural conscience of the initial meta-society, the concept of higher and ultimate divine authority has been destroyed, and the new generations are formed in a relative subordination to nothingness and, as such, not responsible to a real and present divinity. It is important to note that every philosophical, logical, scientific, or any other kind of discourse does not have the intrinsic capacity to modify in any way the reality of the universe. Consequently, any type of discourse Postmodernism would have about the existence of a Sovereign and Authoritative God, this fact does not change reality, and not taking into consideration this fact can be interpreted as complete ignorance, with a possible boomerang effect.

2. Christian Principles

Speaking of Christian principles, we note from the beginning that they are characterized by two great particularities. First, societies and cultures founded on Christian morals and values are intrinsically subordinated to divine authority. Any historical period, any particular denomination of Christian movement we may refer to, all of them recognize the divine sovereignty over them (the only aspects that differentiate them are in the way they understand this manifestation of divine authority).

Secondly, another important characteristic of the cultures that recognize Christian moral authority as a form of government over their conscience is the absolute and relative dimension of the truth communicated by divinity. It is important to emphasize this aspect because the postmodern ideology cancels the absolute dimension of any moral claim that are derived from the divine attributes, absolutes that are atemporal and universal.

2.1. The Source (Origin) Principle

From the point of view of the origin of authority in Christianity, this derives directly from divinity. This assertion is not only the claim or the witness of the Christians, but is represents what God asserts about Himself and in the Christian values system, this authority is manifested in full (Rotaru 2014, 207-209).

Thus, when we speak about divine authority as the primary origin or source in Christianity, we have to speak necessarily about the eternal character and attributes of divinity. As such, these are classified by the systematic theology as nontransmissible and transmissible attributes (Grudem 2004, 161-62).

The nontransmissible attributes of divinity are those divine traits that differentiate YHWH from humans. Because Grudem hesitates to categorically states that these are wholly nontransmissible (Grudem 2004, 161-62), the taxonomy and terminology employed by Ryrie are far more conclusive (Ryrie 1986, 36-44). So, the first and the most relevant of all these perfections of divinity is His *eternity*, respectively the fact that He is eternal by comparison with man who had a beginning and who, spiritually speaking, if he does not submit to His authority, will have an end (respectively, eternal death) (Grudem 2004, 1185-86). The next attributes are also labeled as absolute: liberty, immutability, holiness, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, righteousness, simplicity, sovereignty and truth.

In the context of divine authority over the universe, and implicitly over human cultures and societies, the nontransmissible attributes or perfections of the Christian God are at His disposal, and they become communicable or transmissible only in a small measure and only them when He, in His sovereignty decides to impart them to people. All these divine qualities as absolutes represent a double dimension of His authority: a deontic and a epistemic one.

Thus, the perspective of the Christian values is that there is no other higher authority than God's authority, since one of His nontransmissible attribute is eternity, which, together with His omnipotence gives Him ultimate authority in universe and in the human culture and civilizations, therefore over all creation.

2.2. The Morality (Competence) Principle

Another classification of the qualities, from the Christian Perspective, is emphasized the category of moral attributes (besides the nonmoral ones). Ryrie says about those that they "spring from the very nature of God" (Ryrie 1986, 36). Qualities such as holiness, righteousness, love, and truth represent

ideals of morality having their origin in divinity, and, therefore, they become the basis for Christian morality and its moral compass.

In this context, the Christian ideology has its discourse the fingerprint of divine moral authority. Thus, it has the competence to define the absolutes that derive from God Himself and the quality and assertion that its message is always fresh and relevant for at least five areas that define our society: culture, politics, ethics, philosophy and theology. If it is analyzed apart from the prejudices, patterns and tradition (defined here as ideological cliches of different religious movements in history), it has the quality of tracing a way of living with integrity and respecting Christian values, of eliminating the ideological confusion and disorder in the present and of answering honesty to the existential questions of mankind of the postmodern man: Who are we? Why are we here? What is truth? (Wright 2016, 16-34).

For the Christian culture there is the concept of meta-society, defined usually as the "Kingdom of God", representing the totality of people in different historical times and spaces and geographical areas which are subordinated to the divine authority and for which the Christian values are the same anywhere in the respective meta-culture.

Consequently, the Christian culture appeals to the highest source of authority in the universe, The Primary Cause, for its ideological discourse and for the way in which it materializes the ideals in everyday living. As such, its moral creed is identified and follows the moral dimensions of divinity (that dimension in which the moral absolutes have atemporal character) and is subordinated to divine authority in the dimensions of His perfections (appealing to those for protection and guidance).

2.3. The Stability and Continuity Principle

The Christian principles and values even if they are constantly under attack by the deconstructivism of the postmodern ideology, seem to have an absolute character and time transcendent. As such, they have been summarily asserted in YHWH in the pre-Mosaic time, then very well structured in the Law of Moses, to be utilized then updated in the teachings and live of Jesus, and materialized in the lives of His disciples, many times with enthusiasm even in persecution, from the beginning till now.

It is important to note what the Christians think that God says about His principles and authority, if these are followed and lived. So, according to Christian values, God does a very precise synthesis about His authority through the sacred writings of the Judeo-Christian culture relating to the stability that comes from its fulfillment:

> Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Barker 1985, 292)

Thus, to respect the divine precepts, that is to accept His authority represents a firm condition to be happy, to find the real goal of life, of prosperity and success (Woudstra 1981, 62). So, this principle of continuity stands in direct relation with the previous principle, the morality one: to submit to God's authority, as it stands out from the sacred writings, gives stability and balance to people who practice it rigorously.

The second important passage in this sense is an affirmation of Christ:

> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Barker 1985, 1458)

The affirmation of Jesus takes further the idea of the first quote. First, the passage reflects the continuity of the Christian principles and morality: there are absolute truths, respectively, His eternal authority for which it is desirable to exist a right approach of subordination. Then, the second passage comes with a plastic image about the way in which the authority if Christ must be used in the individual live and the live of the Christian community, in a rhetorical construction well made, as it is presented by Osborne (Osborne 2010, 442-44):

- *The mission or the responsibility of the Christian* – the idea of a yoke implies a lot of responsibility for the one who assumes it. The "yoke" is a metaphor for a relation master-submissive. In a positive sense, it means submission in worshipping the divinity through loyalty and obeisance for the teachings of Christ (this is actually the meaning of real righteousness);
- *Motivation* – in order to materialize in his own live, the Christian or the community he is part of, must appeal to the character of

Christ. He and His love for mankind represent the motivation of submission to divinity.

- *The result*– the result of such an action with a permanent character in the live of a community of people represent, besides stability and continuity, "eternal rest", a direct reference to the new spiritual live in Christ, which transcends time into eternity.

Consequently, from the Perspective of the Christian values, obeisance and submission to the moral authority of God materialized in the individual life through the spiritual work of Christ and by appealing to His attributes, which are permanent, is the guarantee for every society present or future of stability and harmony in his endeavors and in the interhuman relations which he forms, and that is the surety as an element of continuity of such a community. Thus, the Christian promotes a community that aims to be secure, perpetual, and balanced and that can be built by a value system that submits to the divine will, with an ethic and morality according to the universal laws of God.

2.4. The Hierarchical Principle

When we presented the previous principles that characterize authority from the Christian Perspective, the hierarchical principle had an intrinsic presentation, especially through the origins or source principle.

As an additional argument, it is worth noticing and analyzing another passage from the Christian sacred writings. This is relevant, especially through emphasizing a dimension that has a general validity of the hierarchical principle.

> Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather that man!" (Barker 1985, 1653)

Thus, by analyzing this passage, we can note a few things that will complete the perspective already outlined in regard to the hierarchical principle:

- Hierarchically, when the authority of man comes into conflict with the divine authority, the priority belongs to the ultimate authority, the divine one (Bock 2007, 244);

- ✦ The way Luke formulates the answer of Peter from the previous passage, suggests a moral imperative for this obeisance (not political or social) (Bock 2007, 244);
- ✦ Any human authority, no matter how high, compared to the divine authority is always inferior (Bruce 1988, 111);
- ✦ No matter how dangerous it can be to confront a human instance of authority, that action must be done taking into account the universal sovereignty of God – truth must be proclaimed at any risk (Keener 2018, 400).

Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the facts deduced from the previous quoted passage are in total harmony with the universal principle of hierarchy from the point of view of authority. From the perspective of the Christian values, nobody can be above divinity, and every such attempt will be sooner or later drastically punished by YHWH. The precedent one was in the dawn of the human history, through the action of Lucifer, but his punishment was accordingly. So, the Christian ideology shows that the ultimate prerogatives regarding sovereignty and authority on the earth are attributed to divinity.

3. Conclusions

The analysis we endeavor to do in this article aims to bring out as honestly as possible the opportunities and risks that the two ideologies have, intrinsically or potentially, especially when we talk about the claims of authority, a concept asserted by both lines of thinking.

We notice that Postmodernism represents an actual trend in the Western world, not necessarily being an absolute evil. When we state this, we speak about the idea of progress that it promotes, at least in the discourse. Progress represents the evolution of society and culture from the low levels of the organization to the more complex ones, thus bringing something good to the intended civilization. However, there is a risk because of the fundamentals of this thinking and because it seems to define itself mostly by the opposition with the Christian ideology and values; this fact can lead to interminable fights that can affect the very progress it intends to build.

The mechanism used by the postmodern ideology to "produce" the new man, at least culturally and socially, is a mechanism that, at a closer look, can be suspected to potentially fail, especially when we bring into the discussion the concept of authority, because it does not hold true in a logical argument seen through the empirical character of history. We think that as such are under attack the very nature of things and the state of normality validated in time through all the historical adjacent processes, that puts in danger the idea of authority, leading inevitable to the discussion about the perspective about a certain degree of chaos (defined here as a reverse proportional with the quantity of the traditional authority that exists in a society).

In opposition, the Christian ideology and values, especially the conservative ones, have intrinsically on their side at least the test of time, implicitly that of stability and balance, from where spring more and more the qualities and competences acquired in history, thus learning that the idea of hierarchy in the concept of authority is not something pitiable, but the very essential quality for a certain society or civilization to make durable and healthy progress. When this concept of authority is rightly understood and applied the spiritual, cultural, social and even economic development of a society can be justified and common sense goals.

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