IDENTITY BY CONFLICTS? FEMALE PASTORS BETWEEN CARING AND CAREER

A reaction to the essay of Brigitte Enzner-Probst

The author refers to answers of fourteen female pastors of the Lutheran church of Bavaria on the following questions in narrative interviews: What motivated you to study theology and to become a pastor? What is your current situation in view of family and pastorate and what are your perspectives? The gender specific organization of your studies as such is commendable in itself, since there is little empirical social research in theology that explicitly refers to women. And if so, a gender-oriented social research is presented as a plea for a biographically oriented pastoral.¹ To observe the pastorate as a man’s office and to get to the bottom of it in a gender specific way is a wish to which Enzner-Probst has completely dedicated herself.² In the survey of the interviews, her contribution reaches the conclusion that female pastors are actually women in men’s clothes, that the conflicts that are brought into the open here, have to do with the traditional ‘male’ label of the office, forcing women into the alternative of professional or relational work. She sketches two solutions that I will discuss in my reaction. Looking upon office and service as work as well assessing the conflicts of women within the pastorate as an ‘incomplete identity’, as positive.

The team of fathers

In view of the first question concerning the motivation for the study of theology and the profession, Enzner-Probst interprets the reactions of the interviewed as “daddy girls.” The fathers persuaded the daughters to take up the study of theology, other ‘fathers’, such as teacher, pastor, friend or brother motivated them for the pastorate. This ‘team of fathers’ continued to exist for these ‘adopted’ daughters when they at work as pastors. Professors and mentors were there to advise and assist them. Mothers did not play any part in the motivation, at the very most as a life concept that was declined.

I find it astonishing that this question does not render any motives that can be derived from the picture of the profession itself. There is merely
an indication that the picture of the pastor is that of a rational man, competent at analytical reasoning, considered to be the opposite of the womanly social character (p. 12). On the one hand, the women that have been interviewed appear to be attracted by this picture of the pastor, on the other hand they chose theological disciplines, such as pastoral care and social sciences that are interpreted as a continuation of a traditionally feminine attitude. In other words: the decision in favour of the pastorate already precedes a conflict of identity on the level of motivation. The dilemma between being daddy's girl and a reaction of waving aside the mother that is being sketched here, is not necessarily convincing on a motivational psychological level, since it only takes one level of the pastorate (analysis, argument, sermon) into consideration. The significant communicative level is also part of the professional picture. A question for this proposed research into motivation: should not the attraction of this profession be actually looked for on both levels, in the wide-ranging aspects of this profession compared to other leading professions? Not just based on the wish to be like daddy. It is a very confined picture of the pastorate that is presented here, which is continued in the restriction of the motives.

Professional work and relational work

The question presented in the interview about the compatibility of pastorate with family, leads to a division into three groups in this study, expressing the different strategies with which women address this problem. "We found the group of women pastors who had to combine both areas, because they were single mothers and had no other option. A second group chose to quit the job in order to manage household and education work in the background. The third group tried to combine both areas under special conditions and with special results. The condition was that the husband himself was willing to change his 'normal' career in terms of fulfilling the aims of the social character. The result for the women themselves was that there was never time enough to cope with the increasing and never ending demands of each area" (p. 9). The group of women that primarily dedicate themselves to the pastorate, do so in this category out of economical necessity; elsewhere in this contribution the exclusive exercise of the pastorate is also acknowledged as a conscious decision in favour of it ("I want to do this job!"). The dilemma of the mediation of professional and relational work is solved by the second group of women by means of withdrawing from the pastorate. The third group 'wants to have both sides of the coin', which often results in life models, such as job sharing of marriage partners and working part-time on the part of the women in order to combine professional and relational work. It appears that the social separation of pro-