



# Navigating the Postmodern Landscape: Embracing Interdisciplinary Openness in Pastoral Theology

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**Abstract:** In the face of rising secularization and the waning influence of the Church, contemporary pastoral theology encounters both a formidable challenge and an enticing opportunity in the postmodern era. This article explores how enhanced interdisciplinary engagement of pastoral theology can foster a renewed approach to evangelization aligned with contemporary sensibilities. Through a comprehensive literature review, we shed light on the experiences of the postmodern individual. By applying the analogy method and anchoring the concepts of “Logos Spermaticos” and “Influence and Vulnerability” in pastoral theology, we reveal its potential contribution to the interdisciplinary evolution of the concept of universal fraternity. The analysis shows that interdisciplinary collaboration in pastoral theology unfolds developmental prospects on two levels – learning *from* and learning *with* other disciplines. The “Logos Spermaticos” concept underscores the importance of acquiring new skills, empowering pastoral workers to communicate Christian doctrine more effectively. Simultaneously, the “Influence and Vulnerability” concept fosters a dialogical approach, positioning pastoral theology as a respected interlocutor in contemporary interdisciplinary dialogues. Collaborative efforts with other disciplines empower pastoral theology to foster dialogue and deepen the idea of universal fraternity, both in academic discourse and practical application. The interdisciplinary and global development of fraternal humanism represents the necessary “loosening of the soil” for the seed of the Word of God to sprout in the future. Therefore, it becomes imperative for pastoral theology to transcend its conventional role, actively engaging in interdisciplinary dialogue, thereby charting a course toward an elevated societal role and innovative avenues for proclaiming the Gospel.

**Keywords:** postmodernity, pastoral theology, logos spermaticos, influence and vulnerability, universal fraternity, interdisciplinary dialogue

In the Western world, the Catholic Church is grappling with its role within a secular postmodern society and culture. In this pursuit, it faces a multitude of challenges. Traditional pastoral approaches are progressively losing their effectiveness, while novel methods are often met with apprehension and skepticism. Over the past five centuries, the Church has navigated significant political, social, and cultural shifts. While in the year 1500, it was almost impossible not to believe in God, the 21st century presents precisely the opposite scenario (Taylor 2007, 25). The advent of modernity signified a rupture from traditional Christian society, and in the latter half of the 20th century, the era of postmodernity emerged.

The transition from traditional Christian society to the modern era, alongside the concurrent process of secularization, has been extensively studied. According to

modernists, the Biblical God has become a relic of a superstitious era that hinders human progress toward true liberation. Thinkers like Émile Durkheim, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and others, who were instrumental in shaping modern thought, have introduced new ideas in philosophy, sociology, politics, and psychology, with the aim of completely reorganizing our way of thinking and subsequently replacing traditional values, religious doctrines, and teachings. Disillusionment with the grand narratives of modernity, such as exclusive humanism, scientific and technological progress, principles of production, and the market economy, which failed to deliver the expected results, culminated in the tragedies of both world wars. This led to the advent of postmodernism (among its key architects are Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty, Fredric Jameson, etc.), in which there is no room for grand narratives but is characterized by relativism, skepticism, epistemological constructivism, pluralism and subjectivism. Postmodernism is suspicious of reason and acutely sensitive when discussing the role of ideology in maintaining political and economic power (Svetelj 2022, 171–72).

The Church has consistently responded to evolving societal dynamics. In response to the critiques of modernity, it fortified itself by reinforcing its teachings and institutional structures, methodically developing a robust doctrine, and establishing an efficient governance system. This evolution gradually gave rise to Catholicism as a socio-cultural manifestation of the Church, symbolizing a steadfast response to the challenges posed by European modernity, the Reformation, and the ongoing processes of modernization, secularization, and globalization. Viewed in a historical perspective, Catholicism represents the result of a defensive mentality and practice that evolved from the Counter-Reformation era up to the First Vatican Council, which marked the pinnacle of this development (Nadbrzeżny 2023, 3). Many Christian thinkers developed an apology of the Christian faith (Borto 2022, 504–6). Christianity, therefore, grappled primarily with another grand narrative during the modern era, which Taylor refers to as exclusive humanism (Taylor 2007, 242–48).

The advent of postmodernity signifies the culmination of an era characterized by the collision of grand narratives, which had been relegated to the margins. Christianity, and by extension, Catholicism, have undergone a transformation, experiencing a waning societal influence, as they find their place among the myriad legitimate worldviews and religions in a predominantly secularized and pluralistic Western culture (Svetelj 2022, 172–74). While postmodernity does not outright reject Christianity itself, it does reject its metaphysical underpinnings, which are branded as manifestations of power and violence (Klun 2022, 985). In response to the societal shifts brought forth by the onset of postmodernity, the Catholic Church embraced a more open and dialogical approach through the Second Vatican Council, departing from its previously defensive stances. The terms “aggiornamento” and “dialogue” emerged as distinctive markers of this new trajectory (Nadbrzeżny 2023, 5). In addressing the prevailing secularism of contemporary society, many

thinkers embarked on a quest to lay the groundwork for constructive interfaith dialogue (Kałuža 2023, 853–54).

In the forthcoming discourse, we will center our attention on the realm of pastoral theology and explore its potential to engage in meaningful dialogue with other academic disciplines. This dialogue seeks to revitalize and enhance its methodologies, thereby enabling it to connect more effectively with individuals navigating the complexities of a postmodern world. Our endeavor will include an exploration of the distinctive experiences and fundamental needs of the post-modern individual. Building upon the foundational concepts of “Logos Spermaticos” from the patristic tradition and the “Influence and Vulnerability” concept we will underscore the imperative of fostering greater interdisciplinary collaboration of pastoral theology.

## 1. The Human Experience in the Postmodern Landscape

In order to effectively address the contemporary individual, pastoral workers must possess an understanding of the complexities of their experiences, needs, and potential challenges. In this chapter, our aim is to illuminate the fundamental aspects of human existence in the postmodern era through a literature review. This effort will serve as a foundational guide for pastoral theologians as they navigate the post-modern landscape. Simultaneously, this review will serve as a starting point for our further exploration of how pastoral theology can enhance its methodologies through interdisciplinary dialogue, ensuring their alignment with the realities and experiences of the post-modern individual.

The contemporary individual no longer accepts a single, externally imposed source of objective truth as a given. Instead, they rely on their own subjective experiences and past encounters. They no longer blindly adhere to authority and its doctrines; instead, they perceive authority as someone who assists them in developing their personal religious experiences and aids them in discovering their own religious identity (Svetelj 2022, 172–78). Another significant outcome of subjectivism is the development of a culture of authenticity, expressive individualism, in which people are encouraged to explore their own unique path to self-fulfillment (Taylor 2007, 299). The logical consequence of subjectivism is, therefore, cultural and religious pluralism (Stala and Vodičar 2018, 186). In the postmodern era, individuals often explore various spiritual practices, with influences from Eastern religions being appealing to many (Halík 2017, 91–93).

Following the expulsion of God from traditional Western society and the subsequent inadequacy of reason to fill that void, the era of existentialism and epistemological constructivism emerged. In this period, individuals no longer rely on reason to provide definitive answers to fundamental questions about their existence.

Instead, they emphasize a subjective perspective and prioritize personal development in their quest for “eudaimonia” – a fulfilled and happy life (Svetelj 2022, 170). Central to their focus are experiences, with an emphasis on emotions and key relationships in their lives. In the context of this shift, attachment theory has gained significant prominence in the field of social sciences over the past fifty years. This theory places the regulation of emotions at the core of human development and psychotherapeutic treatment. Numerous studies during this time have highlighted how the attachment formed in early childhood, particularly in relation to parents, significantly influences the overall quality of an individual’s life (Schoore 2012, 27–51). Daniel Goleman, in his influential works, has underscored the importance of emotional and social intelligence for leading a successful life. These concepts have become crucial elements that complement subjective experience and personal development. Emotional and social intelligence impact the quality of relationships and an individual’s ability to adapt to life’s various challenges (Goleman 1995; 2006). Consequently, we find ourselves in a therapeutic age where psychotherapy has become a substantial presence, filling the void left by the withdrawal of religion from public life (Svetelj 2022, 174–76). The psychotherapeutic approach integrates insights from attachment theory, emphasizes emotional and social intelligence, and highlights personal development as key elements for achieving a fulfilling life.

Among the most significant factors shaping an individual’s life in the postmodern era is undoubtedly also the phenomenon of globalization, where the world is becoming a single “global village.” In this context, people simultaneously experience the same events and use identical mass consumer products. Cultures intertwine and influence each other, consequently diminishing the importance of local and national culture, as well as nation states. The process of globalization is closely intertwined with the proliferation of information technology, offering individuals an extensive array of choices in shaping their own identities and value systems. Information technology, facilitated by mass media, social networks, and consumer-driven orientations, drives such rapid societal changes that individuals no longer have the capacity to critically evaluate the significance of these changes for themselves. In a world lacking stable signifiers, they can no longer find the foundations for establishing a solid, stable identity; instead, their identities become fragmented and subject to constant adaptation to ever-evolving global trends (Stala and Vodičar 2018, 185–89). Pope Francis discusses deconstructivism within the social and cultural sphere, highlighting its tendency to marginalize historical memory while closely intertwining with boundless consumerism and empty individualism (*FT* 13).

In the quest for identity, the contemporary individual often turns to consumerism, through which they affirm their existence („I consume, therefore I am!“) and purchase their own value. Willing to work hard and sacrifice much, they seek to increase their income and thereby strengthen their position as a consumer. Skillful advertising from global, recognizable companies imposes the idea that one can

belong to a specific social group only by using their products, which have become established as status symbols (Osewska and Stala 2021, 737).

## 2. Pastoral Opportunities in the Postmodern Landscape

After delineating the key elements of the human experience in the postmodern era, the question arises regarding the appropriate pastoral approach in guiding believers to receive adequate support on their spiritual journey. The secularized postmodern culture, with all its challenges, also presents some valuable opportunities for pastoral practice to assist believers in deepening their personally and freely chosen faith (Groome 2019, 30–33).

Pastoral theology, seeking to approach the individual within their subjectivity, should respectfully listen to their (religious) experience. The interest in an individual's authentic experience serves as the starting point for a potential dialogue between the pastoral worker and the believer, enriching the individual's development of their religious experience. In accordance with the Socratic tradition, Tomáš Halík refers to such respectful accompaniment as “maieutical.” He suggests that sometimes the right answer is having the courage and patience to keep asking the right questions (Halík 2017, 8–9). The pastoral practice of the modern individual is more inclined to provoke with a maieutic rather than an authoritative (*ex cathedra*) approach, which is also applicable in overcoming the crisis of identity. If we consider the excessive inclination towards consumerism as one of the symptoms of the contemporary human identity crisis, the task of pastoral theology is to assist this individual in seeking a path to fundamental answers about themselves and to enable them to relate their own responses to the transcendent.

Pastoral practice grapples with the task of addressing the heightened emotional dimension of the contemporary individual and aspiring to achieve a more balanced right-hemispheric approach. While commendable progress has been made, there exists a continuous opportunity for refinement, especially in instilling authentic enthusiasm and a wholehearted dedication to community well-being. The pursuit of a more right-hemispheric balanced approach in pastoral practice remains an ongoing journey, necessitating a deeper exploration of emotional and intuitive dimensions.

As pastoral practices evolve, a genuine commitment to developing quality interpersonal relationships emerges as a pivotal factor for transformative impact on both individuals and the broader community. This entails recognizing and responding authentically to the diverse and evolving needs of the community. In essence, the evolution of pastoral care should encompass a sincere and dynamic engagement with emotional, intuitive, and interpersonal dimensions, fostering a positive and resonant communal experience that aligns with the contemporary individual's multifaceted

journey of faith and well-being. Contemporary evangelization approaches, therefore, focus on the wholeness of human experience and encourage the development of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ (Szewczyk 2021, 723). The holistic approach, which is close to the contemporary person, also involves the inclusion and consideration of the body in spiritual life (Platovnjak 2023, 25–26).

Among the key opportunities for the development of pastoral theology is the interdisciplinary approach, identified on two levels – *learning from* and *learning with* other disciplines. The first level (*learning from*) aims to strengthen the methods of pastoral work and establish a dialogue with other disciplines, while the second (*learning with*) involves seeking new interdisciplinary approaches to creating a more humane society, raising the quality of vulnerable groups, strengthening dialogue with other disciplines, and establishing pastoral theology as a significant, valuable participant in the contemporary social context. In the following two chapters, we will apply the concepts of “Logos Spermaticos” and “Influence and Vulnerability” using the analogy method to evaluate the significance of openness in pastoral theology for interdisciplinary dialogue (Ketokivi, Mantere, and Cornelissen 2017, 637–58). This will represent an enhancement of the dialogical approach of the modern Church.

### 3. “Logos Spermaticos” and the Interdisciplinary Approach to Pastoral Practice

In this chapter, we will employ the patristic concept of “Logos Spermaticos” to substantiate the need for an interdisciplinary enriched pastoral theology that is capable of *learning from* other disciplines. During the formative centuries of Christianity, as the Church Fathers heralded the Gospel, they masterfully wove a tapestry of metaphors, narratives, literary constructs, philosophical tenets, and mythological motifs endemic to their era. In this intricate process, they engaged in profound dialogues using the rich conceptual framework inherent to their cultural milieu, concurrently enriching it with novel and profound insights (Svetelj 2022, 169). As the Gospel spread, the Church Fathers were cognizant of the imperative for theological engagement with contemporary pagan culture. One of the pioneers in the dialogue between early Christianity and the pagan world was St. Justin, with his concept of “Logos Spermaticos” playing a particularly pivotal role in this endeavor (Holte 1958, 8–9). According to this concept, God created the world by embedding the seed of His Word (Logos) within it, allowing it to grow and evolve across diverse cultural contexts until its ultimate fulfillment. Within these contexts lies a profound truth that needs to be unveiled and perfected through the Good News. Justin the Martyr, Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and other Church Fathers incessantly sought this seed of truth in pagan environments, which could serve as the foundation



for evangelization (Svetelj 2022, 169–70). Despite being regarded as apologists for Christianity, they can justifiably be considered among the first dialogical theologians (Kristiatmo 2021, 276–77).

Continuing, we aim to demonstrate that the concept of “Logos Spermatikos” can also be applied to the realm of science, an area underutilized by pastoral theology. Numerous disciplines have developed new knowledge and insights, as well as effective methods for working with people, which could significantly enrich pastoral practice. This is also emphasized by Pope Francis when encouraging the development of pastoral care of families:

The response to the consultation also insisted on the need for training lay leaders who can assist in the pastoral care of families, with the help of teachers and counsellors, family and community physicians, social workers, juvenile and family advocates, and drawing upon the contributions of psychology, sociology, marital therapy and counselling. [...] All this in no way diminishes, but rather complements, the fundamental value of spiritual direction, the rich spiritual treasures of the Church, and sacramental Reconciliation (*AL* 204).

The concept of “Logos Spermatikos” can foster greater openness in pastoral theology to new insights and the incorporation of innovative working methods developed by other disciplines. From the perspective of “Logos Spermatikos,” knowledge emerging outside the field of (practical) theology is the fruit of the seed planted by God in creation, granting it fundamental legitimacy. Therefore, pastoral practice must not ignore it but strive to integrate it with all its efforts so that the seed is glorified, “bearing much fruit” (John 12:24).

Although the integration of insights and working methods emerging from other disciplines may seem self-evident and rational, this process occurs (too) slowly, with significant resistance, caution, and skepticism. The reasons for this can be found in the complexity of changing perspectives, which involves understanding the aforementioned social and cultural changes and transitioning from traditional Christianity to a Christianity that strives to remain a valuable interlocutor in postmodern society. Changing perspectives is a complex process that, in our opinion, must occur bidirectionally, both top-down (e.g., Church teaching, clerical formation, theological curriculum, and research) and bottom-up (e.g., regional synods, acceptance of initiatives from the Church community, presentation of case studies of good practices, etc.).

Beyond the scope of this discussion is the determination of numerous disciplines that can significantly contribute to enriching pastoral practice. However, considering the characteristics of the postmodern era described above and its associated experiences and the needs of contemporary individuals, we can indicate some key directions for the interdisciplinary development of pastoral theology. Additional competencies of pastoral workers in promoting quality interpersonal relationships,

balancing professional and family life, regulating the emotions of those who are suffering, evaluation and validation of individuals' personal experiences, creating and leading small communities, understanding the issues of addiction (including information technology), mental health, loneliness, poverty, and social exclusion are highly important (XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: First Session 2023, 4c). Therefore, we believe that the Pope's call in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, initially focused on pastoral care of families, should be applied more broadly to the entire field of pastoral theology. The incorporation of insights and working methods from other disciplines is crucial both for understanding the needs and experiences of believers and for enhancing the competencies of pastoral workers. As we will demonstrate further, an empowered and, above all, interdisciplinary open pastoral practice also forms the foundation for a quality and deep dialogue between the Church and the world.

#### **4. Pastoral Theology as a Valuable Interlocutor in the Dialogical Postmodern World**

The second level of the interdisciplinary approach in pastoral theology (*learning with*) involves the exploration of new interdisciplinary solutions to foster a more compassionate society, enhance the well-being of vulnerable groups, strengthen dialogue with other disciplines, and establish pastoral theology as a significant and valuable participant in the contemporary social context. Before delving into the interdisciplinary and dialogical nature of pastoral theology, let's first introduce the concept of "Influence and Vulnerability," which has gained recognition in the realm of psychoanalytic supervision and treatment. This concept is also applicable to interdisciplinary dialogue. At its core, it acknowledges a tension within the client during psychoanalytic treatment—a delicate interplay between the desire for influence from the analyst and the associated fear. The shift towards a relational focus in psychoanalysis has underscored that authentic transformation in treatment materializes only when an environment of safety and a foundation of trust are established. In this context, influence arises from mutual vulnerability, signaling a joint commitment from both the analyst and the client to evolve and grow together (Slavin 1998, 233–46).

As our discussion unfolds, our intention is to demonstrate that this relational principle can be seamlessly extended to the realm of dialogue, where pastoral theology engages with other disciplines. Only when pastoral theology is capable of embracing its own vulnerability, inadequacy, initiating self-questioning, and transforming through dialogue with other disciplines, will it truly become relational and, as such, sufficiently secure and appealing for fruitful interdisciplinary dialogue. The application of the concept of "Influence and Vulnerability" will assist us in further elucidating



the crucial role of the dialogical approach in pastoral theology, a significant component of the developing dialogical ecclesiology (Nadbrzeżny 2023, 3). The skepticism among certain Christians concerning the conciliar call for dialogue between the Church and the contemporary world can be attributed, in part, to apprehensions about potential identity loss or perceived compromise of professed truths amid the exchange of arguments. The anti-dialogue disposition frequently emerges due to a deficit in faith regarding mutual comprehension and consensus. This mindset may be an outcome of a steadfast belief in the imperative to convert others, coupled with a reluctance to consider the possibility of being converted by others. Such sentiments are rooted in concerns about the Church's potential erosion of its missionary zeal (Nadbrzeżny 2023, 9).

At this juncture, we touch upon a key point where pastoral theology can advance in interdisciplinary dialogue. Authentic dialogue is not the art of transforming the other but the creation of trust, mutual understanding, and a search for ways to grow and develop together. In interdisciplinary dialogue, the goal is not to seek the dominance of one discipline over another but to sincerely develop a relationship and a common path. Pastoral theology must, therefore, be aware that every authentic dialogue reflects the fundamental dialogue that God initiated with humanity—the dialogue of salvation. Alongside authenticity, attentive and respectful listening, gradualness, patience, and an awareness that the fruits of encounter are ultimately God's grace are crucial (Polak 2021, 712–13). The readiness of pastoral theology for authentic interdisciplinary dialogue, learning both from and with other disciplines, and its readiness to collectively address the most urgent societal challenges will make it a desirable interlocutor in the contemporary world. Such an approach, where the institutional aspects of the Church as a *societas perfecta* are not foregrounded, will gradually lead to changes in media representations of the Church (Kraner 2021, 182–83).

Further reflection is needed on how pastoral theology can develop interdisciplinary collaboration. A unified model cannot be specified as collaboration depends on cultural contexts, state legislation, and numerous other factors. Additionally, collaboration can occur at different levels, beyond academic research on societal issues. To move forward practically, pastoral theology needs to engage in interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration at both macro and micro levels. At the micro level, fostering dialogue to find common solutions for alleviating the suffering of the most vulnerable groups is crucial, with pastoral workers taking a proactive stance. Pastoral theology will become more socially relevant and a desirable interlocutor by collaboratively seeking and shaping new solutions to improve the quality of life for those on the margins and facing life's challenges.

Vulnerability in pastoral theology, understood through the application of the “Influence and Vulnerability” concept, also involves initiating dialogue with other institutions, stepping out of the comfort zone, and risking rejection, initial disapproval,

and doubt about the sincerity of its intentions. If pastoral theology cannot withstand this risk and vulnerability, it will not foster the relationships necessary for greater social and interdisciplinary involvement.

A comprehensive analysis of the possibilities for interdisciplinary collaboration of pastoral theology with other disciplines on a practical level exceeds the scope of our discussion. Various fields emerge where pastoral theology can be a highly esteemed interlocutor. These include the areas of mental health, social exclusion, charity, or social justice. Pastoral theology can make a significant contribution to the development of palliative care (Platovnjak 2022, 65–70). Research demonstrates the vital role spirituality plays in processing traumatic experiences (Jerebic, Bošnjaković, and Jerebic 2023, 361). One of the most pressing issues today is the need to rediscover hope, which can give meaning to life and history and enables people to walk together (Gardocki 2023, 273). Recently, theology has increasingly focused on evaluating and supporting ecological efforts (XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: First Session 2023, 4q). Drawing from the Church's social doctrine, pastoral theology can contribute significantly to the evaluation and development of social entrepreneurship (Zadroga 2022, 998–1003).

On the vertical plane of pastoral theology, the concepts of “Logos Spermaticos” and “Influence and Vulnerability” synergize to fortify the notion of universal fraternity, a central tenet of Francis's fraternal humanism. Just as this principle extends to individuals, nations, religions, and cultures, fraternal humanism further evolves through the collaborative efforts of diverse scientific disciplines engaged in dialogue. Together, they strive not only to preserve the essence of humanity but also to champion universal values and pursue the common good. Fraternal community is shaped by ethical relationships that presuppose freedom, equality of all participants, and respect for the dignity of each (Petkovšek 2019, 22–25).

The Church, operating across various domains but particularly in academic realms, is summoned to both safeguard and foster dialogue, crucial for the cultivation of fraternal humanism, seeking tangible and practical manifestations. In this framework, religious education plays a pivotal role, actively shaping a religious identity that is not only open but also committed to advancing the ideals of universal fraternity (Rybicki, Mąkosa, and Mazur 2022, 95). Encouraged by Pope Francis in the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, the Church is called to bravely embrace its leading responsibility in synthesizing all knowledge to foster interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary unity. This vital undertaking involves collaboration with various disciplines and should be approached with wisdom and creativity, illuminated by the Light of Revelation (VG 4,c).

Theology should fulfill this role with a high degree of sensitivity towards inclusivity and the acknowledgment of other disciplines, inviting collaboration in service of a common goal. Its role can be understood in terms of transcending or renouncing Giraud's mimetic desire, which, even at the level of interdisciplinary

collaboration, leads to competitiveness and division (Petkovšek 2022, 588–92). This approach would ultimately overcome the conflict with humanism that characterized the modern era. The vision of universal fraternity is so crucial for the development of humanity on various levels that it should materialize in academic circles through active movements and international forums, fostering vibrant (academic and political) discussions and seeking innovative and interdisciplinary solutions in the spirit of universal fraternity. Strengthening fraternal humanism, in our view, represents a crucial foundation for loosening the soil upon which the seed of the gospel can continue to flourish in the future.

At the same time, we want to emphasize the significance of the horizontal dimension in the development of interdisciplinary collaboration in pastoral theology. The application of the concepts “Logos Spermaticos” and “Influence and Vulnerability” encourages pastoral workers to adopt a more courageous and dialogical approach in establishing partnerships with other institutions. Such an approach is marked by vulnerability and requires courage and respect for dialogue partners, yet it establishes relationships and facilitates the development of ongoing dialogue, seeking new interdisciplinary solutions in the local environment. As we conclude our discussion, we offer some illustrative examples of interdisciplinary collaboration that pastoral theology can foster:

- (a) Pastoral workers, in a scheduled meeting with local healthcare professionals, introduce a new activity in the parish—a biblical-discussion group for individuals in mental distress. They present the target group of the activity, work methods, goals, and expected outcomes. The group is led by a priest and a layperson, a psychologist by profession. Healthcare professionals working with individuals in mental distress actively promote this activity among religious clients. The group is also open to people with different worldviews and accepts them with the necessary sensitivity.
- (b) In response to the priest’s initiative, a network of volunteers is formed in the parish, ready to visit socially excluded elderly individuals and assist them with certain simple household tasks. In a meeting with the local social services center, the priest and some volunteers present the activity, and the center offers it to the most vulnerable individuals in the local community. Volunteers visit individuals who express a desire for such companionship once a month, engage in conversations, and assist them with necessary tasks. Monthly, volunteers gather for supervision with the priest, share their experiences, and develop work methods.
- (c) Pastoral workers in the parish realize the need for additional skills to develop pastoral relationships with parishioners and communicate more effectively with them. They arrange a series of educational sessions with a local psychotherapist to become familiar with key psychotherapeutic interventions (emphatic reflection, validation, evocative responding, heightening emotions, emphatic

conjecture, etc.). Each session focuses on presenting a specific intervention, and through concrete cases, they collectively consider the possible application of each intervention in pastoral practice. They also become acquainted with the limitations and risks of application.

The meaningful and effective integration of pastoral theology into interdisciplinary dialogue is contingent upon the active engagement of adept lay individuals—those who possess expertise in intersecting disciplines and can make valuable contributions to pastoral work. This transformative process requires an internal commitment to interdisciplinary openness within pastoral theology itself. By fostering an environment that encourages dialogue and collaboration not only externally but also internally, pastoral theology can not only receive insights from diverse perspectives but also actively contribute to genuine and fruitful interdisciplinary partnerships. This involves recognizing the unique skills and knowledge that well-trained lay experts bring to the table, facilitating a two-way exchange of ideas, and ultimately enriching the scope and impact of pastoral practices in the contemporary social context.

## Conclusions

In the face of secularization, the role of the Church in society has been marginalized, prompting reflection on how to forge new paths for proclaiming the Gospel to the contemporary individual. The postmodern Western person no longer relies on tradition and religious authority in shaping their worldview; instead, personal experience takes precedence. In the pursuit of authentic self-expression and personal fulfillment, considerable attention is given to emotional experiences and the search for happiness in significant interpersonal relationships. Additionally, local culture plays a diminishing role in the life of the modern individual, increasingly influenced by global trends, often seeking identity through consumerism.

This article contends that the Church, along with pastoral theology, must modernize its approaches to more effectively proclaim the Gospel to the contemporary individual. Greater interdisciplinary openness of pastoral theology can play a crucial role. By applying the concept of “Logos Spermaticos” to pastoral theology, we argue for a more profound transfer of knowledge and working methods developed by other disciplines. Through this, the contemporary individual can feel more heard and addressed. The concept of “Influence and Vulnerability” indicates the path of interdisciplinary dialogue, through which pastoral theology can regain respect as a valuable interlocutor in modern society.

Pastoral theology must embrace the risk (vulnerability) and step out of the “comfort zone,” actively collaborating with other disciplines and institutions. As demonstrated in the discussion, globally, pastoral theology can extend an invitation to other disciplines for the common development of fraternal humanism or the concept of universal fraternity, serving as a basis for reflecting on key social issues. The development of universal fraternity is a crucial phase of pre-evangelization, sensitizing the contemporary individual to be more open to Christian messages and the Word of God. Therefore, pastoral theology should endeavor to establish global interdisciplinary movements that lead to in-depth discussions on the development of this idea. Simultaneously, we emphasize the importance of horizontal integration of pastoral theology at the local level, contributing to an increased role of the Church in society and opening new avenues for proclaiming the Word of God. Integrated into interdisciplinary and interinstitutional collaboration, pastoral theology can reach numerous new individuals, especially those from the most vulnerable social groups. In this process, as emphasized by Pope Francis, the interdisciplinary involvement of lay pastoral workers will become increasingly important.

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