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## **‘Touching the body, hurting the soul’. Some reflections about the importance of non-dualistic anthropological concepts in moral theology**

**Abstract (Français)** – Cet article soutient que les approches dualistes, telles qu’on peut les trouver dans des cadres de pensée de la théologie morale au cours du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, tendent à supprimer la conscience de la corporéité des êtres humains. Cette suppression rend plus difficile une compréhension adéquate d’autrui et de soi-même, et empêche d’avoir pleinement conscience des véritables enjeux dans les cas d’abus sexuels.

Cette hypothèse, selon laquelle ce n’est pas l’enseignement catholique lui-même mais l’attitude dualiste envers le corps et l’âme qui risque d’encourager les abus sexuels, est confirmée par le fait que les cas d’abus sexuels ne se sont pas produits seulement dans des institutions catholiques mais aussi dans des institutions où l’éducation et l’anthropologie sexuelle relèvent d’une approche différente.

En se référant aux perspectives de la psychologie des motivations, à savoir que la vision du monde acquise à travers les expériences et les relations façonne inconsciemment les décisions, l’article affirme que la théologie morale ne peut pas se contenter de formuler clairement la norme qui interdit les abus sexuels. Elle doit aussi éclairer d’autres concepts d’anthropologie théologique qui peuvent empêcher la pleine compréhension de la norme morale, et elle doit encourager le développement de toutes les capacités de la personne à en sentir et juger les enjeux.

**Abstract (Deutsch)** – Der folgende Artikel argumentiert aufgrund der Ergebnisse der Motivationspsychologie, dass moralische Entscheidungen vorwiegend durch unbewusste Einsichten gesteuert werden, die durch Lebenseinstellungen, Beziehungen und Erfahrungen gewachsen sind, so dass zur Vorbeugung gegen sexuellen Missbrauch die Präsenz klarer Normen nicht ausreicht. Vielmehr muss die Moraltheologie einerseits ihren Blick über ihre Grenzen hinaus werfen und sowohl die theologische Anthropologie insgesamt als auch die praktischen Erfahrungsmöglichkeiten im pastoralen Umfeld verstärkt in den Blick nehmen. Der Artikel fragt nach den theologisch-ethischen Zugängen, welche im vergangenen Jahrhundert den Zugang zur Leiblichkeit des Menschen geprägt haben und vertritt die These, dass der darin verbreitete Dualismus und die Geringschätzung des Leibes es erschweren, eigene Wünsche wahrzunehmen und anderen Menschen empathisch zu begegnen,

also in Situationen von Missbrauchsgefahr persönliche Verantwortung ganzheitlich und nicht nur intellektuell wahrnehmen und bewerten zu können. Neue moraltheologische Zugänge sind daher gehalten, individual- und normethische Zugänge zu ergänzen und in einem personalistischen Sinne die Bedeutung eines ganzheitlichen Verständnisses vom Menschen und von guten gelebten Beziehungen in den Mittelpunkt zu rücken.

## 1. How can theologians prevent sexual abuse at a deeper level?

The many cases of sexual abuse, especially of children and adolescents, which took place during the past decades in educational institutions governed by the State or by the Church, have caused strong disappointment<sup>1</sup> and have created deep concern that measures should be taken to avoid such offenses in the future.<sup>2</sup> The task to prevent abuse had been commended to the bishops already in the special letter sent by Cardinal Ratzinger about procedures to be followed in cases of priests sexually abusing children.<sup>3</sup> It is natural that the first and very important reaction concentrates on taking measures and exercising control – e.g. by making sure that no priest be alone with a child in a sacristy, which even leads to the fact that priests renounce having children as altar servers in order to avoid any such situation.<sup>4</sup>

This emphasis on control however is not enough because it tries to stop possible abuse at a stage when it is already about to happen. But what could be done before reaching that stage? The later-stage prevention measures therefore need to be accompanied by early-stage prevention measures. What could those be? The members of the *Working group of German Moral Theologians* have made the claim that it is necessary to have a closer look at possible indirect, systemic correlations between the traditional teaching on sexuality and celibacy within the church and the cases of sexual abuse, though it seems clear to them that

<sup>1</sup> In Germany, the cases of sexual abuse have led to a dropdown of confidence in the capacity of the Church to give moral orientation from March to June 2010 from 29% to 23% and whether it can orient in questions concerning the meaning of life from 45% to 38%; see Kaufmann 2011, 182, Fn. 4.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Keenan 2005, Plante 2004, Steinfels 2004, Bartunek 2006, Rosetti 1996 and 1997, O'Grady 2001, Frawley-O'Deal 2007, Gibbs 1992, Sperry 2003. For a very helpful overview on publications in the German speaking area see: Sautermeister 2011.

<sup>3</sup> CONGREGATIO PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI, *Epistula de delictis gravioribus* (May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2001): ... in votis est ut non solum graviora delicta omnino vitentur, ... sollicita pastoralis cura ab Ordinariis et Hierarchis habeatur.

<sup>4</sup> Several bishops' conferences have issued guidelines for dealing with sexual abuse. A discussion of some of the guidelines issued in Germany is documented in Ulonska/Rainer 2003.

there is no *direct* causality between them (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der deutschen Moraltheologen 2011).

It is the task of theology to reflect on the contribution it can make to prevent cases of sexual abuse or to prevent already the development of personal attitudes that are involved when sexual abuse becomes an option for someone.<sup>5</sup> Positively expressed, theology can make an effort to create conditions for self-reflection and social learning of future priests and pastoral workers that promote personal development and ways of reasoning that help to prevent abuse of others.

From a methodological point of view, the following contribution cannot present more than a preliminary reflection on concepts and structures that create weaknesses and those points in the teaching of moral theology that need to be strengthened. Though it is necessary to concentrate on the perspective of moral theology here, it will be necessary to refer at least to the theological "neighbourhood areas" of theological anthropology and pastoral theology to show its strong relationship with concepts and systems proposed in other theological fields that build a background for moral teaching and practice. The following reflections therefore invite discourse with other theological disciplines and experiences and must remain open for modification.

Such cautionary remarks are also needed because there is no monolithic explanation for sexual abuse. Moral theological and pastoral concepts are only one element in the broad range of possible factors that can make a contribution. Some factors do not seem to be directly related to theological teaching, e.g. medical/hormone related or genetic dispositions, issues of developmental psychology, socio-cultural and environmental factors, but others are: religious forms of socialisation and theologies of ministries, or the attractive features of priesthood for narcissistic personalities, who show a highly idealised self-awareness and are in danger of projecting their own desires and sexual needs on others (Wahl 2011, 63-65). As studies have shown in the past years, psycho-sexual immaturity is the major factor in cases of sexual abuse in the realms of the church.<sup>6</sup>

While it is the task of pastoral theology to develop methods of assuring that all men who prepare for the sacrament of priesthood have reached a stage of psychosexual maturity that allows to predict that sexual abuse will not occur in the future, the question to which we need to confine us here is which influence theological teaching as seen from a moral theological point of view can have on the long process of gaining psychosexual and moral maturity: To what

<sup>5</sup> The International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology has launched an international research project on "Redeeming power. Overcoming abuse in Church and Society", as a contribution to the theological task of preventing abuse of power.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Conway/Duffy/Shields 2003; Rossetti/Müller 1996; Rossetti/Müller 1998; Müller, W. 2007.

extent can the concepts and norms used in theological teaching contribute to strengthening self-awareness and sound relationships to others that are the best prevention measures?

## 2. The task of moral theology: beyond formulating clear norms

But why should there be questions from a moral theological point of view at all? Isn't the horror of what has happened – and still happens to an average of 10% of young people if one includes all kinds of sexual abuse<sup>7</sup> – so clearly felt that a moral norm like “you shall not sexually abuse another person” seems to be self-evident? What is there more to say? The apparent clarity of the norm provokes the impression that from a moral theological point of view, cases of sexual abuse need to be regarded merely as cases of practical deviance from a clearly pronounced moral norm, an impression that leads to the conviction that penal action, be it by ecclesiastic or civil institutions, seems to deserve more attention.<sup>8</sup>

However, is the task of moral theology fulfilled once the norm is clearly pronounced? There seem to be underlying misunderstandings. The first one is an intellectualistic misunderstanding, namely that it is enough to know of the existence of a given norm to motivate oneself to follow it; it does not take into account the results of the psychology of motivation. The second is an isolationist misunderstanding, namely that a norm is valid in itself once it is grounded on arguments, and it cannot be weakened e.g. by competing norms or concepts. Yet it is possible that competing conceptual frameworks may interfere and prevent a person from understanding the full meaning of what is at stake, e.g. in the field of sexual abuse. Since theological concepts and teaching can play a role in forming conceptual frameworks of future priests and pastoral workers, it is necessary to examine them carefully.

<sup>7</sup> According to international studies, every fourth girl and every seventh boy becomes a victim of some kind of sexual abuse during their childhood and youth: “Jedes vierte Mädchen und jeder siebente Junge – so die Schätzungen aus internationalen Studien – werden im Lauf ihrer Kindheit und Jugend sexuell belästigt“, Quelle: SpringerMedizin, online: <http://www.springermedizin.at/schwerpunkt/gerichtsmedizin/?full=2356> [date of consultation: 15.05.2012].

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Jenkins 2005; Green 2003.

### 3. Psychology of motivation: reflecting conscious and subconscious levels of actions

In order to create awareness of the consequences that the use of certain anthropological and theological concepts in moral theological teaching can have, it is helpful to regard some results of the psychology of motivation. In a recent study, the protestant theologian Til Elbe-Seiffart shows that people's actions are based on dispositions that are formed by experiences and insights that have influenced the way we feel about certain realities (in German: "affektive Gewissheitsstrukturen einer Person").

It is the aspect of what makes a person act in a specific way that is looked at by the psychology of motivation which has a special interest in the choices that human beings make when they can choose between various options; Motivation psychologists observe that in a specific situation we decide for one option rather than for another one because we intuitively recall the experiences we have made in similar circumstances in the past. The given situation with its atmosphere evokes certain feelings and thereby makes us understand which way would be favourable or unfavourable for us to pursue. How we act is therefore preconditioned but not entirely determined by concrete experiences in our personal history and in the relationships we have been living in. Therefore motivation psychologists understand intentionality in a broad sense as the disposition of human beings towards specific options of acting. This disposition consists in most cases and substantially of affective certainties that a person has (Elbe-Seiffart 399). The notion "intentionality" as it is used in motivation psychology therefore expresses a holistic directedness of a person's longings and wishes including biological needs and social interaction.

This comprehensive understanding of intentionality is seen as the basis for two other dimensions of intentionality, the first being intentionality as the expression of the importance and worth of an object which attracts my thoughts, the second intentionality as deliberate intention (in German: "bewusst konkrete Vorannahmen oder Handlungsabsichten"). This latter aspect is one of the main elements of a free and rational moral decision at a cognitive level of decision making that is also referred to in ethical and juridical evaluations of accountability.

Ethical decisions made at a conscious level can sometimes contrast with intentionality in its broader sense (Elbe-Seiffart 400). For example, it is possible to rationally make decisions which contrast with one's integral and experience based intention, e.g. when we start a hunger strike in spite of our generally positive view of life. To make a decision that contrasts with one's integral experience however requires a greater effort than one that is guided by feelings which have been shaped by many situations, experiences and relationships. In complementation of a merely intellectual vision of human beings who make decisions

based on reason alone, the psychology of motivation offers insight into the importance of personal world views that have been shaped during a life's time and that direct one's longings, wishes and also most of one's actions.

The observations made by motivation psychology can therefore help us to understand why in cases of sexual abuse knowing the moral norm does not sufficiently guarantee that it will be observed. Rather, abusive actions are chosen, in contrast to what one would judge to be good from an objective, rational and normative point of view.

What kind of experiences, which world views, theological concepts and frameworks do play a role in the context of sexual abuse? What can influence the world view of a perpetrator in such a way that it blurs a clear insight into the character of abuse, and what inhibits a clear defence on the side of the victim? It is obvious that theological concepts can have a direct and an indirect influence, namely at a conscious and at an unconscious level, on human beings and are often also found in combination with other conditioning factors.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4. Missing balance in pastoral concepts and in canon law

Several questions have already been raised, e.g. with respect to ecclesiological visions, theologies of ministries and concepts of power in the training of priests: How do we conceive the relationship between a priest and the persons he takes care of? Does the role of a priest include control over other persons? What are the limits of the use of power? Are there limits to the grade of intimacy, e.g. in the realm of confession; e.g. are there questions that should not be asked? Lüdecke argues that religious forms of socialisation and the theologies of ministry shaped by ecclesiological views and the legal framework of canon law need to be checked against these questions because a hierarchical interpretation of the relationship between priests and lay persons is in danger of creating relationships of inequals, of those who are canonically obliged to show reverence to and obey the priests and those who are (or at least were) educated to be different from normal people by forming a special group with its own rituals and characterised by the obligation not to engage in sexual relationships.<sup>10</sup> Such kind of relationships can bring about that respect for authority blurs the awareness of possible transgressions of limits, especially if a person has not fully developed a firm self-esteem and is not capable of setting limits to others; secondly, the person

<sup>9</sup> An example of how religious concepts e.g. of self-sacrifice can strengthen the incapability of defending oneself against sexual abuse is given by Poling 2005.

<sup>10</sup> On the importance given to purity in the Christian mediaeval cult and ethics see Lutterbach 2008.

that has the authority can become blind for the other person because of the interpretation of one's role as being "superior" to the other (See Lüdecke 42-43).<sup>11</sup>

Other remarks are concerned with canon law: An aspect that possibly weakens the full understanding of the nature of abuse is that sexual abuse by priests according to canon law does not count as an act against the dignity of a human person; rather it is seen as a delict against the vow of celibacy (Lüdecke 45; 49). The letter of the Congregation of Faith mentioned before speaks of abuse in the context of confession; it is conceptualised as a sin against the holiness of the sacrament of confession, not against the dignity of a person.<sup>12</sup> Only if abuse is related to persons who have not reached the age of eighteen, is abuse categorized as a delict against morality. In spite of being regarded as *gravissimum peccatum*, sexual abuse is not mentioned on the lists of intrinsically evil acts that are developed in recent magisterial teaching, though it could be added with good arguments as major offence against the dignity of a person (Müller 2011, 25-32).<sup>13</sup> The framework for categorizing abuse that is used in documents of the Church is obviously focusing on sacramental sanctity and not on human relationship, nor on the moral integrity of the priest and the victim as the two persons involved. One cannot avoid the impression that an impersonalized vision of both acting and suffering members of the Christian community involved in sexual abuse still prevails.

The question can be raised whether the dualistic vision of the human person that theologians tried to overcome during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, together with the focus on sacramental sanctity rather than on the dignity of the person in canon law and some related moral theological teaching may have contributed to forming a framework of thought that was favourable for suppressing – rather than

<sup>11</sup> Konrad Hilpert has asked the question "Who is a good Catholic?" and points to the fact that children need to learn to say "no" in situations in which their intimacy is being violated in whichever way. Therefore it must be a part of religious education to encourage children to develop strong personal strength – that means also that blind obedience cannot be considered religious education. See Hilpert 2010.

<sup>12</sup> CONGREGATIO PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI, *Epistula de delictis gravioribus*, May 18, 2001: Delicta contra sanctitatem sacramenti Paenitentiae, videlicet 1° absolutio complicis in peccato contra sextum Decalogi praeceptum; 2° sollicitatio in actu vel occasione vel praetextu confessionis ad peccatum contra sextum Decalogi praeceptum, si ad peccandum cum ipso confessario dirigitur... Delictum contra mores, videlicet: delictum contra sextum Decalogi praeceptum cum minore infra aetatem duodeviginti annorum a clerico commissum. That the cases distinguished here are not far-fetched is confirmed by victims of sexual abuse. See e.g. a report in the National Catholic Reporter dated 7.12.2001 by Jason Berry and Gerald Renner ([http://natcath.org/NCR\\_Online/archives2/2001d/120701/120701g.htm](http://natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2001d/120701/120701g.htm)).

<sup>13</sup> There is also a history of diverging norms and practices which may have contributed to weakening the importance given to the moral norm. See Inge 1932.

facing – one’s own desires and feelings, and therefore made it more difficult to develop sound self-awareness and empathy for others; the widely spread taboo of sexuality and of other elements of bodily existence especially with reference to the role of a future priest can have contributed to inhibiting a sound psycho-sexual development. Some priests may have detached their self-reflection from their own desires, and instead of integrating them in a positive way in their personality, they may have started to disregard into sexuality as an expression of a “lower” capacity.

Such dualistic concepts however undermine the awareness of both body and soul as correlated conditions of human embodiment. The unity of body and soul presents a central piece of theological and philosophical anthropology, and a separation of both inhibits a sound personal development.

The perspective of the psychology of motivation can explain that theological concepts and moral norms exercise influence both on the level of practical reasoning and subconsciously. There are spontaneous acts, driven by subconscious motivations in sexual abuse, but there is also self-justifying reasoning reflecting a range of elements that can be drawn from authoritative theological sources, sometimes misinterpreting them according to one’s personal interests. How clear the moral norm may be – there can be conceptual frameworks that compete with it or weaken its strength.

## 5. Unbalanced visions in educational theory

The claim for reflecting more explicitly on the correlation of body and soul because the missing balance between body and soul in many theological and magisterial texts is one of the weak points in preventing sexual abuse, is being substantiated by the fact that sexual abuse has also occurred in schools<sup>14</sup> that were oriented according to moral concepts in education that were far away from the traditional Catholic moral education in sexuality. This was the case of the private boarding school “Odenwaldschule” in Germany that followed German reform pedagogy,<sup>15</sup> a pedagogic line that was developed after the “sexual revolution”.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The structure of schools with internships creates a special climate in which abuse is more easily hidden; this links cases occurring in different places. See e.g. the analysis reflecting the reactions of colleagues in cases of sexual abuse by Enders 2003.; see also the critical observations by Rosenberger 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. e.g.: Edestein 1967; Schäfer 1971 und 1997.

<sup>16</sup> For a report of a victim see e.g. Dehmers 2011. For a range of literature related to the pedagogics used at the Odenwaldschule see Füller 2011.



Both in the Catholic tradition and in reform pedagogy it is possible to find the tendency to neglect the intimate relationship of body and soul or a lack of balance between the body and the soul. While the religious tradition tends to focus on the soul by limiting or disregarding bodily experiences, in this specific context of reform pedagogy it was possible to promote a "liberal" approach to bodily sexual experience that did not respect the psychological side to it, so that in both cases the development of body and soul could not keep pace with one another. The "liberation" of the body and of sexuality from social norms that seemed to be old-fashioned at the time when reform pedagogy came up led to a disconnection of sexual activity from the children's level of psychological and personal growth. In such a way, both the restrictive Catholic and the libertarian pedagogic approach were able to create precarious attitudes with respect to an integral vision of the human being, either by understating the importance of the bodily existence by concentrating on the soul, or by prematurely involving the body and neglecting the soul.<sup>17</sup>

The journalist Heike Schmoll speaks of the consequences that these attitudes can bring about in the context of a 'holistic' understanding of education that intends the melting of different roles,<sup>18</sup> which in fact can also occur in pastoral relationships. A pedagogical approach of this kind is more inclined to neglect the borders between teachers and students. Because a teacher in such a system intends to be a father, a friend and a teacher at the same time, he or she is much more in danger of trespassing the professional limits and of involving the student in a mixture of emotional closeness and paternal or maternal care as well as professional authority, which can cause extreme damage to the children's development. A missing balance between care for the soul and care for the body and a lacking focus on their mutual relationship in a conceptual framework allows more easily for a detachment from one's psycho-sexual and moral development and therefore can foster attitudes that might contribute to underestimating what sexual abuse is and does.

This concern with the unity of body and soul does not intend to say that theologians should discard entirely the oppositional terms which are used in our theological tradition to explain changes in religious attitudes, as the bipolar use of flesh and spirit, material and spiritual, sinful and holy, mundane and heavenly, nature and grace, which in their origins (if we remember St. Paul) are not meant to be interpreted corporally, as an opposition of body and soul, but as

<sup>17</sup> Tilman argues that it is easy from a later perspective to detect the errors committed in a former time. He refers to literature about the sexuality of young persons that was read and accepted and ways of thinking at the time when the sexual abuse cases occurred at the Odenwaldschule. See Tilman 2011.

<sup>18</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung online*, date of consultation: 12.7.2010.

life in aversion from or in openness for God, and which in this sense can be very usefully applied.<sup>19</sup>

The concern to reach a balance of body and soul in our theological framework suggests that if we apply these concepts wrongly, namely as implicit division between body and soul, dirty and pure, and so forth, especially in the realm of sexuality, the created contrasts can result in repressing ‘bodily’ feelings right away when they occur before examining them and their message in a given context. In such a way, we allow that parts of what is important to us accede only to the subconscious level of perception, instead of being integrated and given their right place within personal development in all its dimensions. As a result, we are not as much in touch with what is going on in ourselves as we could. From a theological point of view, as bodily creatures, we cannot – and should not – simply deny the message that our body can tell, given that, from an integral Christian anthropological tradition of creation theology, our bodily existence is meant to be a piece of good creation, and in the view of St. Paul, it allows us to be as complete persons temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6, 19).

Suppressed feelings can come up in relationships to other persons and may provoke projections on others whom we may judge accordingly. And, finally, a general disregard for the body and for bodily reactions may also help someone to justify abusive acts as “merely bodily”, not worth consideration and complain, by separating them from “holy attitudes and intentions” of one’s soul that should be guiding one’s life and that are seen to grant one’s moral integrity. One could argue that one just touches the body – not seeing that by touching the body one also touches an embodied soul, a being which cannot be but body and soul, and by doing so one does not only abuse somebody sexually or bodily, but at the same time also spiritually and emotionally.<sup>20</sup>

## 6. Unbalanced concepts in moral theology – a historical perspective

The question remains of where moral theology could start to revise its approaches or the language it uses. An exemplary look back at moral theological teaching during the past century can mark some points of departure for further reflection. Though there were a variety of approaches in moral theology during the twentieth century, they show to a big extent a clear tendency of not looking

<sup>19</sup> For an overview on the Christian understanding of the body in historical perspective see: Keenan 1994. Keenan points out that only during the Enlightenment was the human body neglected in the Christian tradition.

<sup>20</sup> A very good introduction to the inseparability of the exterior act of touching somebody and its emotional dimension is given by Küchenhoff 2008.

at human bodiliness from an integral point of view. Rather they concentrated on physical acts, discarding in the context of sexuality and bodily acts most of what cannot be related directly to the sexual act in marriage and to the duty of procreation. A second aspect is that they focused mainly on the interpretation of bodily acts in the category of sinfulness, so that one could come easily to the conclusion that the body was not seen as a proper expression of the integral human being, but rather as a subordinated tool that could simply be used by the spiritual soul that was seen as the "true self".<sup>21</sup> In these texts, human beings were often regarded as having a body rather than regarding them as embodied persons.

*a. Evaluation of actions only from the "outside"*

The twentieth century has been one of considerable development and discussion with respect to the body and to sexuality. This development in moral theology is framed by a transition from Latin handbooks following the neo-scholastic outline of moral theological teaching to more personalist views expressed in different languages. Just one example in the range of Latin moral handbooks is the one written by Simon Sobiech, a professor from Bratislava at the beginning of the 19th century. In his book, sexuality is treated in the context of sins against the sixth commandment (Sobiech 1824, 201-209). Sobiech states right from the beginning that nearly everything in this field is a mortal sin; it can only be regarded as a venial sin if there was an error in deliberation or not a complete consent (Sobiech 1824, 202).

In his handbook, Sobiech states clearly that sexual abuse is not tolerable, giving the example of the situation of confession: According to him, a person who notices that a priest is abusing the situation of confession in the slightest way should report him to his superior (ordinarius) (Sobiech 1824, 20-209). However, the dominant perspective of the whole field of questions regarding relationships between men and women is one of being able to categorize all possible acts as deadly or venial sins from an external perspective on physical acts. Even kisses and hugs as social forms of welcoming others are being reflected upon and judged: if they are only an expression of local customs and do not arouse pleasure, they are no sin (Sobiech 1824, 205-206).

Sobiech's account of sexual ethics is a good example of how an approach in moral theology that judges an act primarily from the outside and under the general suspicion of deadly sin cannot easily be concerned with personal attitudes and broader anthropological questions. Questions of personal

<sup>21</sup> The importance of a new and positive theological reflection of the body to overcome the traditionally negative disposition has also been stressed by bishops: See e.g. Coles 2002.

psycho-sexual development do not have a legitimate place in the system, since when a categorical judgment is underlying, gradual developments and evaluations are not possible.

*b. The domination of the body as an expression of "spiritual athleticism"*

Another conceptual framework that preserves the opposition of body and soul is presented in a protestant critique of Catholic moral teaching dated 1932 that proposes strict public norms in order to prevent moral transgression (Inge 349). The author, W.R. Inge, defends the view that regarding sexuality, Christians should become "spiritual athletes" by developing "a sense of the duty which they owe to their own bodies as the seat of a higher principle, or, as St. Paul says, as temples of the Holy Spirit." For Inge, the domination of the body for the sake of the Holy Spirit can be unquestionably regarded as "the foundation of Christian Sexual Ethics". He argues in an Augustinian line that "there is nothing impure in the act itself", but at the same time and because of the sacramental value of the marital act that is "becoming the symbolic expression of love" all other possible sexual acts can be regarded as forms of 'desecration' and therefore need to be controlled and oppressed. Therefore Inge confirms "St. Paul's appeal to the spiritual athlete, to exercise as much self-denial to obtain an incorruptible crown as runners and boxers do to win the garland of victory in the games" (Inge 351). Inge is ambivalent in his evaluation of the Catholic position. He criticises "that an exaggerated and unwholesome emphasis was laid upon the preservation of virginity", and explains that the Catholic Church was still trying to maintain this because there is "a very intimate connexion between the sexual and the religious life". Unless the passions are strongly repressed, they may „intoxicate the whole personality to the exclusion of religious interests". But Inge warns also that if the passions "are denied their natural outlet, they may be sublimated into the transferred eroticism of the cloistered mystic...", he concludes that he was not "concerned to defend a state of mind which is obviously unwholesome; but the Christian idea of the spiritual athlete, which, as we have seen, attracted Plato not less than St. Paul, is not to be rejected" (Inge 353-354). By quoting a long passage from Plato the author underlines that the best method for extinguishing all those sexual pleasures that are not related to the marital act is declaring publicly "that they are unholy, hated of God, and most infamous" (Inge 352).

These passages can show that already in the thirties of the twentieth century there was an awareness of the danger that suppression of passions leads to undesired results; but this insight did not prevent the author from concluding that the general attitude of asceticism was helpful to maintain social order, and that God's authority was a good means to strengthen this intention.

This example makes clear that religious education had to aim at dominating sexual desires. Repression with the help of authoritarian arguments – referring to God as highest authority – stood in the centre of attention, not a focus on developing a feeling for the vulnerability of human beings or sensitivity for one's personal development. But an approach that seeks to suppress important features of bodiliness clashes obviously with a positive view of bodiliness and sexuality as an expression of good creation.

*c. The duty to contribute to the conservation of the race*

In the sixties, moral theologians already recommended cautiousness with regard to an exaggerated use of reference to sins in the context of sexual ethics even where still a negative view of the body – interpreted as that part of the human being that needs above all control and domination – can still be found in the texts. For example, Ford and Kelly recommend in their handbook on sexual ethics that the father confessor should aim at leading his penitents, according to their capacity, not only to avoid sin, but to live lives of Christian self-restraint, self-discipline and mortification. According to the authors, excessive sensual gratification leads to spiritual deterioration. But on the other hand they warn not to overstretch the argument of mortal sin: the confessor should not accuse the penitent of having committed a mortal sin except where there is a clear mortal sin (Ford/Kelly, 219-220). In looking for another way of obliging persons to a correct sexual behaviour, namely without continuous appeal to the threat of sin, the authors come to the conclusion:

“Perhaps we can find the source of the obligation in the affirmative obligation to procreate. This obligation, in our opinion, normally requires of couples not merely that they posit substantially integral acts during fertile periods. It requires them in addition to take whatever ordinary means are necessary or useful in order to make their intercourse actually fruitful, thus fulfilling their duty to contribute to the conservation of the race.” (Ford/Kelly, 223).

Though a narrow link between sexuality and sin was cautiously given up, the new approach was characterised by the concept of obligation towards the social duty of conservation of the race; the focus was still on the exterior dimensions of duties referring to institutions. The perspective of understanding sexuality from within the person, as an expression of embodied persons, was not envisaged yet.

*d. Personalism as complementary theory and awareness of the embodiedness of human beings*

The understanding of moral theology as a discipline that concentrates primarily on categorizing sins from an outside perspective has been given up during the

twentieth century, especially in the time around Vatican II. Fundamental moral reflections were introduced as a theoretical framework for understanding moral norms and moral behaviour, integrating results gained by psychological and social insights into human actions. This turn to personalism was linked to a growing emphasis on the embodiedness as a fundamental condition of human beings. Many theologians and pedagogues before Vatican II had become aware of the prevalence of dualistic anthropological concepts used in moral theology. Body and soul were being separated in many contexts, and acts that refer to the body have been despised as worldly and belonging to flesh, while sanctity and holiness were related to the soul and seen as separate from worldly matters.<sup>22</sup> However, the insight that these tendencies stand against the biblical texts and against Christian doctrine have brought about more integrative visions of bodiliness<sup>23</sup> that have also entered into the texts of Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes* 3 refers to the person as “one in body and spirit”, and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 29-30 emphasizes that attention should be paid to the development of the human person and to an education that focuses on the unity and completeness of the person; in 1981, John Paul II’s stressed in his *Apostolic Exhortation ‘Familiaris Consortio’* (especially in no. 32) the unity of body and soul in the human person, and so does the International Theological Commission.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, the memory of a link between “body” and “sin” was not easily to be extinguished in the memory of people and still influenced peoples’ minds. In marital ethics, the duty to procreate, as expressed in the forementioned study, dominated the vision of sexuality and lead to a profound criticism against the

<sup>22</sup> An overview is given by Bernhard Secco 1992 in his diploma thesis “Die Stellung der Kirche zu Leib und Leiblichkeit im Laufe der Geschichte”, Vienna, 126-130. Secco refers to a couple of well-known theologians who describe this problem throughout the twentieth century: Walte 1910, 4; Groll 1948, 1; Rody 1947, 6; Stöckle, 15; Schröteler 1936, 59.

<sup>23</sup> See the examples collected by Secco: Metz 1962, 34; Stöckle 1966, 27, 35; Brugger 1950; Van Peursen 1959, 176.

<sup>24</sup> INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, 2004. *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, No. 28: “The view that bodiliness is essential to personal identity is fundamental, even if not explicitly thematized, in the witness of Christian revelation. Biblical anthropology excludes mind-body dualism. It speaks of man as a whole. Among the basic Hebrew terms for man used in the Old Testament, *nèfès* means the life of a concrete person who is alive (Gen 9:4; Lev. 24:17-18, Proverbs 8:35). But man does not have a *nèfès*; he is a *nèfès* (Gen 2:7; Lev 17:10). *Basar* refers to the flesh of animals and of men, and sometimes the body as a whole (Lev 4:11; 26:29). Again, one does not have a *basar*, but is a *basar*. The New Testament term *sarx* (flesh) can denote the material corporality of man (2 Cor 12:7), but on the other hand also the whole person (Rom. 8:6). Another Greek term, *soma* (body) refers to the whole man with emphasis on his outward manifestation. Here too man does not *have* his body, but *is* his body. Biblical anthropology clearly presupposes the unity of man, and understands bodiliness to be essential to personal identity.”

personalist approaches that entered moral theological thought at the time.<sup>25</sup> A fine example of how personalist and more integral ways of thought entered into traditionally structured moral theological introductory works is Marcel Reding's 'Philosophische Grundlegung der katholischen Moraltheologie'. The contrast with Sobiech's example of hugs becomes obvious when we look at how Reding formulates it: "...hugs are not only bodily touches, but primarily and essentially an encounter with another person" (Reding 1954, 49).

A dialectical movement started between personalist approaches that influenced especially the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* and the personalist language in John Paul II's magisterial teaching, and "externalist" approaches, as the one presented by Ford and Kelly, which regained importance in the language used by Paul VI Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae* (1968).

In a reflection about the discussion between the defenders of a natural law approach and those of a personalist approach to sexual ethics, Lisa Sowle Cahill remarks: "Perhaps less noted are the values potentially to be retrieved from obsolete formulations of the 'primacy' of procreation. For instance, the notion that procreation is somehow written into the physical structure of the 'natural' act of sexual intercourse is one way of attending to the embodied nature of sexuality, and of incorporating embodiedness into moral evaluation. And the argument that human intervention in fertility is illicit because the individual's reproductive capacity is ordained 'to the good of the species' at least recognizes that the individual's sexuality and sexual acts have an indispensable social significance. The task that emerges in the post-Vatican II and post-*Humanae-Vitae* era is to envision sexuality in its broadest possible historical and anthropological context, even while reflecting in the most profoundly personal way on sexual intimacy, love and parenthood. This task is unavoidable if contemporary sexual ethics is to be well-argued and experientially true, and to aim not only to persuade but to inspire" (Lisa Sowle Cahill, 194-195).

Cahill shows how recent moral theology has turned to a personalist pastoral attitude with regard to difficulties in sexual ethics, one of the protagonists being Richard A. McCormick: "Not only does McCormick appreciate the emotional, developmental, and cultural circumstances of the teenager, he also highlights the inadequacies of a 'sin-centered' approach. ... The priest's task is not merely to get others to adopt good conduct exteriorly, but to get them to do it freely and from solid motivation. A priest should facilitate growth toward sexual erring-maturity, which McCormick defines as 'purposeful control' of sexuality – not just

<sup>25</sup> Stephan Ernst has pointed to the fact that this incoherence might be explained insofar as in spite of the change to a personalist language in magisterial teaching under John Paul II, the underlying approach to moral norms was still based on natural law theory. See Ernst 2011, 168. Ernst refers to Ell 1972.



‘chastity’ in the form of ‘static continence.’ In one of his few portrayals of celibate sexuality, he draws an analogy between marriage and celibacy based on sexual control. ... Only the regulation and integration of sexuality in a mature way ‘renders the person capable of true love, of self-donation,’ in a lifetime commitment to another human person or to God” (Cahill 1990, 196).<sup>26</sup>

Cahill’s remark is an example for the rise of a stronger awareness of the “embodiedness” as a basic condition of human beings in moral theology and other theological fields towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.<sup>27</sup> This has a parallel in the growth of interest in phenomenological approaches in philosophy under the same aspect of bodiliness.<sup>28</sup> The insight that embodied creatures do perceive the world and express themselves as embodied human beings has helped to see the moral questions involved from a different point of view that necessarily needs to complement merely externally oriented normative approaches. How human beings act or should act does not only refer to the society and the duties it calls for, but also to self-perception, self-evaluation and insight. A shift has taken place from a more socially oriented to a more interpersonal view. Morality is not captured merely as conformity with religious or societal norms that have the task to maintain an ordered structure in church and society; rather it is also seen as the free consent with and practice of moral insights that have been accepted through learning or experience. They involve the whole person and consist of acting in a way that respects and takes care of oneself and of other persons, fostering their and one’s own dignity.

## 7. An integral vision of the human person in pastoral and moral theological considerations

The psychology of motivation shows how important relationships and experiences are for the decisions that we make. In order to avoid sexual abuse it is therefore not enough to teach the moral norm – it is also important to teach the integrity of the embodied person and the importance of good relationships, two important elements of anthropology that can positively influence one’s personal world view and that can become constituents of good personal experiences. Since moral decisions are not made only on a conscious, but also on a subcon-

<sup>26</sup> Cahill refers to McCormick 1960a and to McCormick 1960b.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. in Italy a whole range of books has been published in this field, of which some may be mentioned here as examples: Neri 2007; Repole 2007; Sequeri 2009; other publications with a special emphasis to bodiliness are e.g.: Ammicht Quinn, R. <sup>2</sup>2000; Coakley 1997.

<sup>28</sup> Just to mention amongst the many a few that are influencing the present debate on bodiliness: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Henry, Bernhard Waldenfels, Rolf Kühn, Hermann Schmitz.



scious level, it is important to make sure that human persons develop the capacity of self-awareness and of empathy for one another, and that they allow for opportunities to make good experiences, especially in the Christian communities.

The question of how to enable good experiences and providing the necessary conditions in practice goes beyond the task of moral theology. Some proposals of where to start have already been made and may be mentioned here. The German pastoral theologian Godwin Lämmermann stresses that in order to avoid abuse of power in pastoral and other educational situations, priests, pastoral workers, and teachers need a kind of empathy that offers the right balance between closeness and power.<sup>29</sup> In order to be able to use power not for one's own purposes, but as a "life-giving force", a sound self love is needed and also a practiced personal freedom.<sup>30</sup>

The model that Lämmermann presents is one that integrates the awareness of "erotic" perceptions in pastoral situations. He understands "erotic" perceptions in a general sense as expression of a capacity to see a person without prejudice, in an empathic way. According to Lämmermann, the capacity to look at someone with an "erotic" view prevents him or her from abuse, because he or she is able to recognise the other person as an authentic and valuable being, that must not be hurt (Lämmermann 2002, 380-381).

Problems arise if self control ceases, if projections occur, and if there is a step towards practised sexuality. Therefore self-awareness needs to be an important part of the training of priests and pastoral workers and also of their continuing formation. This is even more important if new situations in a pastoral context are able to evoke memories of old traumata that may lead to a re-sexualisation; this could turn into "sexualised power" in close pastoral relationships.<sup>31</sup>

In order to make an integral self-awareness and respectful attitudes towards other persons a part of our conscious and of our unconscious guidelines, we need to allow for good experiences – also for experiences of intimacy<sup>32</sup> – of making decisions that are responsible with respect to oneself and to others, of empathy and respect, in which we remain true to ourselves in integral, embodied persons

<sup>29</sup> An overview of the role of empathy in moral education is offered by Plüss 2010.

<sup>30</sup> To describe pastoral workers and priests as "lifegivers" goes back to Symington 1998; for this reference see Wahl 2011, 68.

<sup>31</sup> The term "sexualised power" describes the fact that the kind of sexual abuse taking place cannot be explained as being caused by excessive sexual instincts, nor can it be compared to sexuality or love as they would be appropriate for a certain phase of life. Rather, the other person is being used to fulfil one's own needs by using religious beliefs or rituals in a manipulative way that hurts the dignity and integrity of the related person. See Wahl 2011, 67.

<sup>32</sup> The importance of intimacy for the personal maturity of priests and members of religious orders has been stressed by Müller, W. 2010.

related to others; thus it will be possible that in the end we will not act out of fear, but out of confidence and faith – to ourselves, to our feelings and reasons, to our religious belief, and in empathy with others. Of course, by acknowledging the importance of positive experience, it is necessary to also admit the possibility of failure and learning from failure. An ethical and pastoral approach of what might be called an ethics of personal growth (in self-love, self-awareness, empathy and responsibility) seems to be the most adequate for this purpose. Such an approach can help to strengthen young people in their sensibility and understanding of the damage that abuse creates, and can stimulate developing standards and guidelines of moral and pastoral formation further. With regard to moral theological and pastoral approaches, the importance and possibility of sound relationships in parishes between priests, pastoral workers and all other members needs to become a central point of attention. If we live good relationships, we can learn mutual acceptance and respect in an integral way and therefore more sustainably than by studying moral norms alone. Therefore ethical approaches that concentrate on individual reasoning and normative guidelines need to be complemented by good practice and by ethical teaching that throws light on integral, embodied human persons who are aware of their needs and wishes and who are called to live in responsible relationships (Lintner, M.M. 2010).

What is the contribution that moral theology can make?<sup>33</sup> Having realised the gap between normative approaches and practical decisions, a thorough reframing of a practical anthropology that takes the embodied person seriously can present a necessary complement to traditional points of view. First steps have been made in philosophy, theology and magisterial teaching, but they need to be developed further. A second point is that acknowledging the importance of world views for acting, the reflection about theological and anthropological concepts needs to expand and invite the “theological neighbourhood areas” to join in the process. The fragmentation of theological points of view might be one of the reasons for fragmented visions of the human person. The philosopher Gernot Böhme developed an “ethics of embodied existence” in which he states: If we do not practice our awareness of being embodied persons, we will not fully understand moral situations; we will not be affected by what is at stake; we will not feel the commitment with ourselves (Böhme 2008, 246). To develop such a commitment in ethical theory in the Christian context and to strengthen it in practice will be one of the important tasks for the moral theology of the coming years.

<sup>33</sup> The most recent large anthology of reflections on the many aspects that moral theology needs to reformulate in the field of sexual ethics is Hilpert 2011. The articles gathered in this large volume cover the whole range of sexual ethics, and some also mention aspects of what this article focuses upon.

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