

The Influence of Dynamic Trinitarian Ontology on Sexual Moral Theology: Personhood, Relations, and Experience

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The paper discusses the development of moral theology in the Roman Catholic Church, the way this development opened the doors to the various methods and schools of thought, philosophical and theological worldviews, the ways of perceiving and comprehending human experiences theologically, and of grasping the depths of personhood and a personal being. One of the greatest options for overcoming the reductionistic tendencies in manualist tradition in moral theology was relational ontology. The latter was the theological grounding of the dynamic trinitarian ontology. This paper explicates the influence of dynamic trinitarian ontology on moral theology and precisely on sexual moral theology.

Key words: Dynamic Trinitarian Ontology and Personhood, Moral Theology, Relational Ontology, Sexual Moral Theology, Trinity.

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Introduction

Moral Theology has become one of the most argued about, intensively discussed, and controversial branches of theology in the last sixty-five years.¹ In the Roman Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council was the explicit and significant cause for such a development.² Until the 1960s the prominent place in moral theology was held by the »manualist tradition«. ³ The latter is connected to the practice introduced by Confessors of writing manuals and diving into the questions about what constitutes the relation between sin and absolution.⁴ The answers were essentially influenced by the theological and philosophical debates regarding natural law.⁵ After the Council, moral theology freed itself from reductionist tendencies⁶ and became inclined toward progress and change. The permissibility and possibility of change needed a theological grounding and the dynamic trinitarian ontology turned out to be the most solid foundation for promoting the renewal of moral theology.

Parallel to these developments, obvious changes took place in the field of philosophy. The continental tradition seemed to take new and radical steps toward the inquiry into the relational ontology that also encompassed the ethical dimensions.⁷ Christian theologians were not indifferent to such thinking traditions, claiming that the fathers of the Church also shared the same categories and basic assumptions as the post-modern phenomenologists: for example,

¹ Cf. Paulinus Ikechukwu ODOZOR, *Moral Theology in an Age of Renewal*, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2003, 6.

² Cf. Charles E. CURRAN, *Catholic Moral Theology in the United States: A History*, Washington, Georgetown University Press, 2008, 83.

³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 63; James F. KEENAN, *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics*, New York, Paulist Press, 2022, 237. There were some neo-Thomistic writings, too, but they »shared a lot of the characteristics of their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century predecessors« (Odozor, *Moral Theology...*, 3).

⁴ For example, the tension between »laxists« and »rigorists« led some radical probabiliorists like François Genet to withhold absolution for almost any sin. Delaying an absolution for months even became a fashion (Cf. Keenan, *A History...*, 240-241).

⁵ »The casuistry embedded in the Roman Catholic manual tradition greatly contributed to misinterpretations of natural law« (Romanus CESSARIO, *Introduction to Moral Theology*, Washington, Catholic University of America Press, 2001, 77).

⁶ In reductionist tendencies I refer to the problematic and troubling developments of manualist tradition that reached its peak during the Second World War (1939-1945) until the Second Vatican Council. This matter will be discussed in more detail in the first part of the paper.

⁷ This started from the phenomenological inquiry into the intentional character of our consciousness with Edmund Husserl, acquired an ethical character with Max Scheler, but became foundational in the ethical thoughts of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. Martin Heidegger's influence on continental philosophical tradition made it quite detached from ethical concerns but Levinas' thought, making ethics the first philosophy rather than an ontology (contrary to the way it was regarded since Aristotle), was a radical turn toward overcoming the *egoist* ethics and becoming the ethics of being *responsible for the other*. See, Dermut MORAN, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, New York, Routledge, 2000, 19, 320-321.

that the *relation* is the constitutive element of existence, not the *substance*.⁸ The primacy of relation over the substantial differences and all the problems emerging out of them had huge consequences for explicating the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers – this relational way of approach was used as a tool to grasp the connection between *modes of being* and *personhood* both in God and in human being.⁹ This led moral theologians to consider the relational dimensions of personhood while discussing the moral status of a certain act. This could not have been considered as profoundly in previous approaches toward the question of morality that were more rationalistic and lacked the appreciation for a historical dimension of the human person developing gradually in time.¹⁰ Sexuality, being one of the significant dimensions of human personality, was either directly or indirectly influenced by the dynamic trinitarian ontology.

In this paper, I will present the stages of development that moral theology had to go through to, first, fulfil the theological preconditions to support the change in moral theology, second, embrace the relational approach toward the dimensions of the personhood, third, how this influenced and can still influence the understanding of human sexuality: 1. The Second Vatican Council, the need for change in moral theology, and deviation from the manualist tradition. 2. Relational Ontology, Personhood, and Experience. 3. Influence of the above-mentioned tradition on sexual moral theology.

The paper aims to show that the Church, by wanting to engage in the dialogue with its followers and the world, has two options: either to choose that the Other is co-constitutive of the being of the Church or that the Other is the one a-symmetrically constituting the being of the Church.¹¹ In both cases, as

⁸ This change resembles the process of leaving the cartesian substance-dualism and accepting relational ontology. »With the insight that, seen as substance, God is One but that there exists in him the phenomenon of dialogue, of differentiation, and of relationship through speech, the category of *relatio* gained a completely new significance for Christian thought«. And »They are not substances, personalities in the modern sense, but the relatedness...« (Joseph RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity* [epub format], San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2004, 161-162). For an insightful book on the problem of relation and substance in the cappadocian thought, Cf. (Giulio MASPERO, *The Cappadocian Reshaping of Metaphysics: Relational Being*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2024).

⁹ For the connection between the personhood and mode of being (*tropos hyparxeos, τρόπος ὑπάρξεως*). »It is because of and through their *tropos* that the divine and the creaturely natures can unite, since it is the *tropos* that is capable of adjustment. Substance is relational not in itself but in and through and because of the 'mode of being' it possesses« (John ZIZIOULAS, *Communion and Otherness*, London, T&T Clark, 2006, 40).

¹⁰ Cf. Odozor, *Moral Theology...*, 5.

¹¹ When the paper refers to the Church in general, it denotes the unity of *Sanctorum Communio* as a body of Christ universally, therefore, in this kind of generalisation it is not referring to a certain institutional body of the Church, for example, certain teaching authority like Magisterium and it doesn't exclusively refer to the lay believers but all of them together. When there is a need to denote a certain part exclusively, the paper refers to it exclusively, not using the general term »the Church«. In most of the cases, the paper is trying to be inclusive in language,

will be explicitly discussed in detail, the Church needs to be open to change. The development of moral theology and the innate disposition of the Roman Catholic Church toward change after the Second Vatican Council gives all the foundations for such openness. This is crucial for understanding the possibility of revision of sexual moral theology inside the Church and the contemporary challenges that the Roman Catholic Church faces today.

The Second Vatican Council and Changes in Moral Theology

The practice of confessions and penance which led to reconciliation is much older than the manualist tradition.¹² The latter had its forerunner in the books called »penitentials« (existing, at least, since the fifth century)¹³ in which one could find the lists of sinful acts coupled with suggestions for their appropriate penance. This practice laid the groundwork for the development of casuistry – a process of identifying the good through comparing the different cases.¹⁴ In it, the disposition towards becoming »legalistic« was already present.¹⁵ The presence of such a rigid spirit easily found its place in manuals, too, because it relied upon a rationalistic understanding of natural law¹⁶ which, as the manualists thought, could supply »the equivalent of a complete moral theory«.¹⁷ Yet, not every representative of this tradition held a common conception of natural law shared by all.¹⁸ One could even argue that it seems as if, at least in some cases, the content of the concept has been either taken for granted without any further inquiry or thought to be self-explanatory, in both cases leading the tradition to fall into misconceptions and ambiguity rather than reaching clarity on the issue.¹⁹ However, this problem was not solved by the intellectual efforts that many have undertaken to precisely define the content of the concept: whether the natural law is something that humans share with other creatures such as animals or whether it is more of an intellectual and rational

because theologically the responsibility towards the Other which is discussed in this paper is what the whole body of Christ equally shares.

¹² Cf. Stanley HAUERWAS, Samuel WELLS (Ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, 44.

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁶ »As a system which emphasizes clear and distinct ideas, rationalism 'tends to distract users of the method from the complexity and richness of the human condition...« (Odozor, *Moral Theology...*, 5).

¹⁷ »Natural law is not the only resource needed for a complete theory of Christian morality« (Cessario, *Introduction to Moral Theology...*, 77).

¹⁸ Cf. »There has never been a coherent, monolithic theory of natural law with an agreed-upon body of ethical content existing throughout history« (Charles E. CURRAN, *The Development of Moral Theology*, Washington, Georgetown University Press, 2013, 74).

¹⁹ Cf. Cessario, *Introduction to Moral Theology...*

element of human beings connecting them to God, there is no one answer that all manualists can give.²⁰ Yet, even after the Second Vatican Council the disputed term »natural law« still is used in various cases, without resolving the problem of its final definition. For example, the conception of natural law has been used to go against any sexual activity that is not linked to reproduction.²¹ Here one can recognize the static ontological understanding of natural law which is perspicuously opposed to what Thomas Aquinas, after some evaluation of other conceptualizations of natural law, had to say about its definition.²² To sum this all up, the manualist tradition became so obsessed with certain sins that it became detached from reality.²³ Reducing everything to the norms established by something as ambiguous as the natural law resulted in estrangement and alienation from the real world. Even though some moral theologians, like Alphonsus Ligouri, were trying to find a middle way between too lax or too rigid approaches, recognizing the possible dangers expected from both sides,²⁴ manualists became so distanced from the real and tangible problems of the world that they became concerned with all the little details of the lives of every believer:

»While the Vatican teachings regarding war and killing were few, their attentiveness to the necessity of Catholic education, to prohibitions of theological books, to matters of birth control, and to the dress of women highlighted that their interests were more set on controlling life within the Church.«²⁵

Pope Pius X, who advocated for theological conservatism, paradoxically became the reason for paving the way toward the new Council and renewal in the field of moral theology.²⁶ He began promoting more participation in the Eucharist, forcing people to think more about what they believed and what they were

²⁰ This was also a problem during the scholastic period, moving between Paul's letter to Romans 2:14 in NT and the Decalogue in OT. One cannot find a linear development of the concept of natural law, which could, at least, support the idea that this ambiguous diversity of opinion led to something shared by all, or that there has been any common reception of a certain definition of it. This would lead to texts written by the same author in which different definitions would come together, too (Cf. Curran, *The Development...*, 75-82).

²¹ Cf. Joseph A. SELLING, *Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, 19; Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology...*, 86.

²² Aquinas, in his teleological and eudaemonic comprehension of ethics, linked the natural law to reason and intellect, and that »a law is essentially the work of reason« (Leo J. ELDERS, *The Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Washington, The Catholic University of America Press, 2019, 198). His view is eudaemonic because it conceives happiness as the *finis ultimus*, the final end or goal (Cf. THOMAS VON AQUIN, *Über das Glück – De beatitudine*, Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, 2012, ix).

²³ »As the time went on, Catholic manualists, like the hierarchy in Rome, became more and more concerned not with facing the challenges of the world but rather conforming to the rigors of the church« (Keenan, *A History...*, 264).

²⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 244.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 264.

²⁶ Cf. Selling, *Reframing...*, 106-107.

taking part in.²⁷ People started to appreciate the Bible more, which was not represented in the manualist tradition as much as they expected it to be.²⁸ The Moral theologians started to feel the need for change and renewal but manualist tradition was so attached to the magisterium, becoming its »servant«,²⁹ that it embraced an antagonistic spirit against any idea of innovation.³⁰

The Second Vatican Council in its decree on the training of priests, namely *Optatam Totius*, emphasized the necessity of perfection through renewal in the field of moral theology.³¹ This impulse gave rise to the »revisionist« tradition in opposition to the manualist approach.³² The principle of *aggiornamento* was meant to make the Church engage in dialogue with the modern challenges of the world.³³ The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* promoted the revitalization of the connection between faith and daily life.³⁴

Dei Verbum, a dogmatic constitution of the Second Vatican Council promulgated by Pope Paul VI, refers to the divine revelation in personalist categories of communication – addressing men, moving among them, inviting and receiving them into his own company.³⁵ »These categories seem to invite humans into the trinitarian dynamism.«³⁶

This text discerns between two traditions in the Church: between the apostolic or constitutive, therefore, sacred traditions and post-apostolic or church traditions that can be called continuing traditions.³⁷ Therefore, the only static tradition is that of revelation, but the second kind of tradition is not static but dynamic, changing and becoming the living presence of revelation through conversation with it.³⁸ The tradition that has apostolic origins is making prog-

²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁹ Cf. Keenan, *A History...*, 266.

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

³¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 275-276. Cf. also the decree on priestly training, *Optatam Totius*, proclaimed by his holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965, chapter V, 16. »Special care must be given to the perfecting of moral theology«. For this and other important sources from the Second Vatican Council, I also use German translation (Karl RAHNER, Herbert VORGRIMLER, *Kleines Konzilskompandium*, Wien, Herder Verlag, 2008, 306).

³² Cf. *ibid.*

³³ Cf. Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology...*, 84. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, promulgated by his holiness, Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965. Preface, 3. Cf. Rahner. *Kleines Konzils...*, 450.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 85. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, promulgated by his holiness Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965, chapter VI, 43. Cf. also Rahner. *Kleines Konzils...*, 491-492.

³⁵ Cf. Marciano VIDAL, Progress in the Moral Tradition [Charles E. CURRAN (Ed.), *Change in Official Catholic Moral Teachings*, New York, Paulist Press, 1999, 319-334, 320]. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, solemnly promulgated by his holiness Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965, chapter I, 2. Cf. also Rahner, *Kleines Konzils...*, 367-368.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 321.

³⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

ress in and through the Church.³⁹ The progress takes place with the help of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰ Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, written in 1993, also has something to say about the dynamic nature of tradition.⁴¹ The tradition started by the apostles is the one in which »the authentic interpretation of Lord's law develops, with the help of the Holy Spirit«. ⁴² The emphasis is repeatedly on the »living« tradition which, of course, does not increase the revelation but increases human knowledge and brings them closer to the scripture gradually.⁴³ *VS* is the first church document in the Roman Catholic Church that carries the principle of doctrinal development up to the field of moral theology.⁴⁴ On the one hand, both of the above-mentioned documents are based upon the belief that the Church is assisted by the Holy Spirit in its progress and this belief, on the other hand, is based upon the trinitarian dynamism. The latter cannot be explained without the relational ontology and its significance for comprehending the mystery of the Trinity of one God.⁴⁵ This has led the Roman Catholic Church to make progress in recognizing the diverse and rich *human experience* as a gift of God which, throughout history, opens the doors of new truths for the Church.⁴⁶ The truth is not historical but the epistemological side of the human being and the Church full of imperfect humans is historical in approaching and getting closer to the truth.

This opens the door to the revision of old epistemological methods. The revision and reevaluation of the past moral theological statements opened its door to different methods, and the field »was no longer tied to one methodology«. ⁴⁷ This was a significant change in the 20th century, now that the field of moral theology no longer identified itself only with the various Thomistic traditions or Thomas Aquinas himself but became open to considering other schools of thought.⁴⁸

³⁹ Cf. *ibid*, 322.

⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid*. *Dei Verbum*, chapter II, 8. »This tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit«. Cf. also Rahner, *Kleines Konzils...*, 371.

⁴¹ Cf. *ibid*, 323.

⁴² Cf. *ibid*, 324. Cf. Ioannes Paulus PP. II, *Veritatis Splendor*, chapter I, 27.

⁴³ Cf. *ibid*.

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid*. *Veritatis Splendor*, chapter I, 27. »Precisely on the questions frequently debated in moral theology today and with regard to which new tendencies and theories have developed, the Magisterium, in fidelity to Jesus Christ and in continuity with the Church's tradition, senses more urgently the duty to offer its own discernment and teaching, in order to help man in his journey towards truth and freedom«.

⁴⁵ This will be discussed in detail after evaluating the connection of relational ontology with ethics outside and without religion in the next chapter. After this, the trinitarian dynamism will be explained in the light of its basic categories and assumptions about the structure of reality.

⁴⁶ Cf. Vidal, *Progress in the Moral Tradition...*, 330.

⁴⁷ Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology...*, 83.

⁴⁸ This significant change had an impact on political issues, too, namely discourse about the Church and its relation to political liberalism, democracy, socialism, communism, fascism, etc. (Cf. Curran, *The Development...*, 64).

Relational Ontology, Personhood, and Experience

The word ontology in »relational ontology« does not denote the static natural state of human beings, (pre-)determining the measure of good and bad actions *a priori* without considering the historical factors, i.e., the context in which such an act took place. It is not absolutist at its core but rather denotes a dynamic and relational mode of being, enabling moral theologians to encompass complex historical dimensions and conditions around the person while evaluating the moral status of an act.⁴⁹ Judging the moral status of an act without considering the context, and the dimensions of a human person is like opening a book, reading only half of the page in the middle of the whole story, and judging the morality of a character based upon this little fragment of character's life. This is even worse than judging a book by its cover. Of course, »reading the whole book« about the life of every believer who did not commit a deadly sin, is impossible but the impossibility of engaging in such an endeavour should humble the confessioners and prepare them to gradually overcome the problem without becoming too rigid while considering the preconditions leading a person to such an act. This is why relational ontology might turn out to be different from a relativistic understanding of reality because in relational ontology »I« is not relative to »Thou« but is relational to it, i.e., it is a matter of *intentionality* and *relationality*, not necessarily of relativism.⁵⁰

In this worldview, as mentioned above,⁵¹ the *relation* is the constitutive element of existence, not the *substance*. This means that personhood is constituted through the relations of a person with others and vice versa, not through a static and never-changing substance that stays the same and remains in the same condition in every context.

»Once relationality becomes a central concern – and here it is relationality as an ontological condition – then the actuality of relations needs to be named. Integral to that process is the naming of defining aspects of this relations as the ethical. As a consequence, any thinking of the ethical is already a thinking of relationality«.⁵²

⁴⁹ This does not mean that norms are not of importance in an ethical discourse that considers intention and motivation. It only means that norms do not »occupy the primary place that they did in the penitentials and moral handbooks« (Selling, *Reframing...*, 120). This means that norms are revisable and changeable.

⁵⁰ This kind of relational approach opens the doors to the context, but doesn't necessarily lead to relativism. The ontological relationality or the ontological relativity can be differentiated from the relativism. Such a possibility cannot be excluded or ruled out without further ado and is to be considered and investigated in a much more profound and thorough analysis in future theological, philosophical, as well as scientific inquiries.

⁵¹ Cf. the 9th footnote above.

⁵² Andrew BENJAMIN, *Towards a Relational Ontology – Philosophy's Other Possibility*, New York, Suny Press, 2015, 114.

This way of conceiving the ethical has been an essential part of the dialogical principle in relational ontology: starting from Martin Buber's theory of dialogue between two persons co-constituting each other's personhood in and through their otherness,⁵³ continued by Emmanuel Levinas' conception of the a-symmetrical constitution of the personhood of the »Self« through the Other.⁵⁴ Now that the Roman Catholic Church is open to »dialogue«,⁵⁵ it has to conform to the principles of being-in-dialogue with the Other, who- or whatever this may be. This means that Ecclesia has to decide the measure of the significance of the Other in relation to the »I« of the Church. If we look at the church history in general or, at least, in its institutional expressions, the Other was a-symmetrically subordinated to the »I« of the Church: whether this would be »heathens«, »unbelievers«, »sinners«, »apostates«, »witches«, »slaves«, »women«, etc. Everyone who has suffered under the decisions of the Church that were made in an unloving and uncaring manner, every »Other« that was not held to be, at least, co-constitutive of the value of the existence of the Church, has been witness to the inability of the body of faithful united in Christ to be Christian enough to be open to dialogue.

The representatives of revisionist tradition have also been, in some sense, on the side of the oppressed »others«, while Pope John Paul II, who also promoted change and progress by mentioning the dynamic understanding of the living trinity in *Veritatis Splendor*,⁵⁶ silenced those moral theologians who wanted to make some changes in reality, too, not only with beautifully arranged words in encyclicals that would not have any tangible outcome in the Church and its teachings, paradoxically, because of the resistance to change from the one who wrote them in the first place.

⁵³ »Buber makes the Other co-constitutive with the I in the structure of being« (Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness...*, 47. See also Martin BUBER, *Das Dialogische Prinzip*, München, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2021, 197-211, in which he discusses individual being in Kierkegaard's philosophy and reflects on his loneliness. Kierkegaard's individual being is apparently in contrast to the personal being portrayed in the works of Buber and Levinas.

⁵⁴ Paul MARCUS, *Being for the Other – Emmanuel Levinas, Ethical Living and Psychoanalysis*, Wisconsin, Marquette University Press, 2008, 36, 42; Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness...*, 49.

⁵⁵ Cf. Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology...*, 84.

⁵⁶ Cf. Vidal, *Progress in the Moral Tradition...*, 323. Pope John Paul II also emphasized the connection between the loving relationships between the persons in the triune God and the loving relationships between the family members because the God itself is not a solitude in itself but a unity of loving family which means that he took the personal approach toward both; This is also the case with the post-apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* written by Pope Francis who, by referring to Pope John Paul the II, also takes relational and personal approach while talking about family (Cf. Papst FRANZISKUS, *Amoris Laetitia - Freude der Liebe*, Wien, Herder Verlag, 2016, 41).

Relationality in the Personhood of the Trinity and its Dynamic Existence

The Trinitarian Churches confess that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons in one God. This mystery cannot be explained with human categories but can be approached in epistemological humility with the tools that relational ontology gives a theologian, the philosophical understanding with its emphasis on the mode of being (*tropos hyparxeos*, τρόπος ὑπάρξεως) determining the personhood in God,⁵⁷ not the divine substance which is one, inseparable and indivisible. Three substances would make the God three instead of one, transforming it into Tritheism. This means that God is relational not only towards its creation but also towards itself. Only this kind of God, as opposed to the Monistic and static conception of God – the unmoved mover –, could be a living and personal God, *numen personale*.⁵⁸ This means that the believer can have a personal relation to God, for example, while receiving a calling to become a priest or receiving consolation after a prayer.

Influence of the above-mentioned Tradition on the Sexual Moral Theology

For example, if God has a personal relation to a female believer and she receives a calling to become a priest, then the Roman Catholic Church today is not prepared to receive her and God's calling for her. She becomes »the Other« for the Church who, if ordained, will be excommunicated without any dialogue or consideration of her own experience. This is legible evidence of the Church hierarchy⁵⁹ being selective in choosing the richness of the human experience that could open up new truths to it, either the ones that it has not known before or the ones it knew and chose to forget.

This is the kind of »the Other« that should be considered if something can truly be regarded as a dialogue.⁶⁰ In both cases, whether the Church sees the Other as a co-constitutive one or, in the best-case scenario, sees itself a-sym-

⁵⁷ Cf. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness...*, 40.

⁵⁸ *Numen personale* is opposed not only to a monistic conception of God but also to *numen locale*, the local God, bound to one place instead of being universal (Cf. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity...*, 107-108).

⁵⁹ The reference is made to the Church hierarchy, because this cannot refer, for example, to the moral theologians, especially in the revisionist tradition, who have been trying to overcome the selective standpoint but still have to face the fact that the Church teachings about these kinds of selectively taught moral subjects remain unchanged.

⁶⁰ This is the only possible ground upon which the encounter can take place (Cf. Michael MAIER, *Philosophie der Begegnung. Studien über Robert Spaemann*, München, Verlag Karl Alber, 2021, 19-21).

metrically constituted by the Other, it should be ready to change itself but not selectively. If, for example, the Roman Catholic Church's relation to homosexuals and their will to be integrated into the body of Christ without having to give up their sexual identity⁶¹ determines the mode of being of Ecclesia,⁶² then the Church has to find a way to engage in dialogue and answer the request of the »Other« without imposing conditions that are impossible to meet. If it is true that »*Human sexuality* is placed today within the framework of integral vision of the person«⁶³ or, at least, if it is meant to be placed within such a framework today, then the premises of the sexual moral theology do not seem to correspond with the realization of its promises in the living reality of the Roman Catholic Church. Given that the refusal to accept homosexual relationships was based on the cultural context surrounding the writers of the texts that are included in the Bible,⁶⁴ and that the relationships that are condemned in the holy scripture are violent and oppressive,⁶⁵ not loving relationships between persons, shows the possibility of rethinking the exclusive position that the Roman Catholic Church (and others, for example, Orthodox Churches) holds on such issues.⁶⁶ At least, the Roman Catholic Church can be open to listening to those Church traditions that already have a more accepting relationship with LGBTQ+ groups, and already have women priests.⁶⁷

Some cases force any human being to question their claim to decide something on behalf of »the Other«. For example, the Church in its teachings can refuse to be »for« abortions in general but not be too categorical in being »against« it when the case is connected, for example, to rape.⁶⁸ The Church should be able to humble herself in the face of such oppression and pain to

⁶¹ In the same way heterosexuals are allowed to be integrated into the communion of the body of Christ without having to give up their sexual identity in any way.

⁶² It is determined by it because according to relational ontology, the relation of the Church to Others is the one determining the »how« (Wie) and »what« (Was) of the Church. It is not just its relation to itself, which would be those whom the Church already accepts without asking them to lose their identity but those whom she has not been ready to accept yet.

⁶³ Vidal, *Progress in the Moral Tradition...*, 328.

⁶⁴ Cf. Martin STOWASSER, Homosexualität im Neuen Testament? [Stefan SCHREIBER, Konrad HUBER, Karl Mattias SCHMIDT (Hg.), *Geschlecht, Sexualität, Ehe: Sondierungen im Neuen Testament*, Freiburg, Herder Verlag, 2023, 147].

⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid*, 149.

⁶⁶ The story of Sodom and Gomora is misused for justifying the exclusionist attitude from the Church toward homosexuals when, in reality, it is a violent sexual act and the violation of the law of hospitality (Verletzung des Gastrechtes) that is condemned in the story (Cf. Stowasser, *Homosexualität im Neuen Testament?...*, 150).

⁶⁷ Lutheran and reformed Churches are to be mentioned here (Thomas RÖMER, Homosexualität und die Bibel«, *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie: Sexualität*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2020, 47).

⁶⁸ »If a woman who conceives after being raped believes in good faith that she has to abort the child, Häring says she does not have to be told that this is wrong, but he would not tell her that it is a good thing to do« (Charles E. CURRAN, *Tradition and Church Reform: Perspectives on Catholic Moral Teaching*, Orbis Books, 2016, 276).

leave a place for the people of God to stand with the oppressed, to say that even though abortion is not »good« in itself, still in such cases the Church is not in any position to decide on behalf of the victim or to go against it. This is made possible through the lenses of ecclesiology which is based on relational ontology, emphasizing the dynamic and personal nature of reality. If the integral vision and experience of the person are truly valued in the Church, such cases that awaken compassion and empathy toward the victim could become another case for the teaching of the Church to be revised. If the Church does not require the believers to gauge out their eyes when they are tempted or cut the hand that causes them to stumble, then the Church should also be considerate when the case is connected to divorce.⁶⁹ If the Church is selective while following the sermon on the mountain, reading part of it literally and part of it allegorically, then this causes trouble in the conscious followers of the Church who see this kind of bias where forgiveness and love should be presiding, not the will to punish.

Pope Francis' attitude and comments show the presence of a more pastoral approach towards the sexual matters of the faithful and the teachings of the Church,⁷⁰ emphasizing the importance of patience in accompanying people through the stages of growth, but the *telos* towards which the priest leads the believer is still to be revised and re-evaluated.

Conclusion

The manualist tradition was not sufficient enough to exhaust all the challenges that Christians face in the field of moral theology. The Second Vatican Council opened the doors to the renewal of theological disciplines and emphasized the importance of development in moral theology. The Council did not reduce the teaching to one philosophical teaching, opening its doors to the diversity of thinking traditions, one of them being relational ontology. The Church claimed to be ready for a dialogue with the truth and for tackling the challenges of the modern world. The permissibility and possibility of change needed a theological grounding and the dynamic trinitarian ontology that relied on the experience of the Church that sees itself led by the Holy Spirit turned out to be the most solid foundation for promoting the renewal of moral

⁶⁹ »In the Light of some comments made by Pope Francis, some members of the synod on the family used the law of gradualness to justify the participation of some divorced and remarried people in the Eucharistic banquet« (Ibid.) This leads to the significance of graduality in the pastoral work which is realized through the dialogical approach towards the human beings; Pope Francis connects this with Pope John Paul II who suggested the »law of graduality«, not the graduality of the law itself (Cf. also Franziskus, *Amoris Laetitia*, 245-246).

⁷⁰ Cf. *ibid*, 275.

theology. The dynamic nature of the triune God in its loving relationships cannot be understood without the above-mentioned relational ontology.

Therefore, the Church, by wanting to engage in the dialogue with its followers and the world, has two options: either to choose that the Other is co-constitutive of the being of the Church or that the Other is the one a-symmetrically constituting the being of the Church. In both cases, the Church that is ready to engage in the dialogue needs to be open to change. The development of moral theology and the innate disposition of the Church toward change after the Second Vatican Council gives all the foundations for such openness. This is crucial for understanding how this development influenced and still can influence sexual moral theology and the possibility of revision of the latter inside the Church, not only in the minds of theologians or in the Magisterium's teachings but in everyone who has the responsibility towards the Other by being part of the universal body of Christ. The relational and loving attitude towards sexual matters lets the Church overcome its selectiveness regarding the evaluation of some sins. If it is true that »*Human sexuality* is placed today within the framework of integral vision of the person«⁷¹ or, at least, if it is meant to be placed within such a framework today, then the Church has all the right reasons for being more inclusive and accepting towards those who remain till today as »the Other« because of their sexual identity, gender, or certain experience that the mind thinking with the static understanding of natural law could not comprehend so easily.

⁷¹ Cf. Vidal, *Progress in the Moral Tradition...*, 328.

Mate Saralishvili*

*Utjecaj dinamične trinitarne ontologije na seksualnu moralnu teologiju:
osobnost, odnosi i iskustvo*

Sažetak

U radu se raspravlja o razvoju moralne teologije u Rimokatoličkoj crkvi, načinu na koji je ovaj razvoj otvorio vrata različitim metodama i školama mišljenja, filozofskim i teološkim svjetonazorima, načinima teološkog opažanja i razumijevanja ljudskih iskustava te shvaćanju dubine osobnosti i osobnog bića. Jedna od najvećih opcija za prevladavanje redukcionističkih tendencija u manualističkoj tradiciji u moralnoj teologiji bila je relacijska ontologija. Potonje je bilo teološko utemeljenje dinamične trinitarne ontologije. Ovaj rad objašnjava utjecaj dinamične trinitarne ontologije na moralnu teologiju i upravo na seksualnu moralnu teologiju.

Ključne riječi: dinamična trinitarna ontologija i osobnost, moralna teologija, relacijska ontologija, seksualna moralna teologija, trojstvo.

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