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DESACRALISATION AS THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE CHURCH

ROSMINI'S DIAGNOSIS ON THE PLAGUES OF THE CHURCH AND THEIR TOPICALITY

In the first part of the essay, the author examines the five plagues of the Church that are presented by the great Catholic intellectual Antonio Rosmini in 1848 in a text entitled Delle Cinque Piaghe della Santa Chiesa which was very influential for Italian Catholicism in the 20th century. The author argues that the text is not simply a diagnosis of the unsatisfying state of Catholicism but also refers to the question of the sacred and the holy. Holiness is to be linked the unpronounceable Tetragrammaton YHWH designating something inaccessible to human power. Rosmini, conscious of the power mechanisms of society and their totalitarian grasp, imagined a lovingly devoted Church to have the task of renouncing earthly regimes of power, thereby remembering its evangelical origins. The author shows that each of the plagues designates a critique of Church's claim to worldly power. In the second part, he examines a conception of holiness in which the holy designates man as oscillating between two subjects, his own and that of Jesus, the latter marking a radical opening of the subject and the abundance of the name of God. It is betrayed when the Church becomes a sacral and institutional space of exception. In the third part, the author introduces four new plagues of the Church: the exclusion of laymen from joint responsibility for the Church, the claim to moral superiority as a legitimisation of sacralised power, sexual abuse and clericalism as patriarchal power and the exclusion of women from the sphere of holiness. While these contemporary plagues indicate an understanding of holiness inadequate to the Gospel, Pope Francis's notion is rooted in the latter, thereby sharing Rosmini's notion of holiness, a notion that according to the author, is decisive for the future of the Catholic Church.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The starting point of the following article is the little text by the great Catholic intellectual Antonio Rosmini entitled *Delle Cinque Piaghe della Santa Chiesa* from 1848. Starting from this text, which had considerable influence on the progressive Italian Catholicism of the 20th century and



thus on the development of the Catholic Church before, during and also after the time of the Council,¹ this article tries to bring the five plagues of the Church named by Rosmini up to date. In this context three facts need to be emphasised:

1. The topic of the following article cannot focus thoroughly on the life, work and reception of Rosmini. However, there are a series of great books in the Italian sphere of which we can hope that they might make their way into other languages. I want to name M. Dossi's book on their behalf: *Il santo proibito. La vita e il pensiero di Antonio Rosmini*, which gives a rich overview of Rosmini's writings, but also some secondary literature. The study by P. Marangon is dedicated especially to the five plagues of the church: *Il risorgimento della chiesa. Genesi e ricezione delle "cinque piaghe" di A. Rosmini*. Amongst others K.H. Menke: *Vernunft und Offenbarung nach Antonio Rosmini. Der apologetische Plan einer christlichen Enzyklopädie* and F. Bellelli: *Etica originaria e assoluto affettivo. La coscienza e il superamento della modernità nella teologia filosofica di Antonio Rosmini* grant a profound insight into Rosmini's theology. As to the history of Rosmini's reception, which with many regards intersects with Pope Paul VI's life, I would like to name F. de Giorgi's book: *Paolo VI. Il papa del moderno*, and also V. Nardin's article : *Paolo VI, Rosmini e i Rosminiani*.

2. Rosmini's text on the five plagues of the Church is not simply about the diagnosis of the unsatisfying state of Catholicism and the possible ways out. On the contrary, the text is an expression of Rosmini's spirituality² in which the question of the sacred plays a decisive role. Rosmini lives a life of deep attachment to the Church and devotion to the Gospel through which he recognises Christ's Church as willed by God.

3. From this reference arises the limit of the possible adaptation of Rosmini's critical points to the present, which would ultimately presuppose the sanctity, love and humility of the example. I can only attempt to critically consider some of these developments, that currently risk hiding the sanctity of the Church in the eyes of many, on the basis of an affection for Creation, the world, the Church and the SACRED – without reaching Rosmini's depth. In this sense may this article be dedicated to my friends in Trent, who again and again take on the troubles of the Gospel anew and the troubles of theology and philosophy, that should not be underestimated: S. Zucal, F. Ghia, P. Costa, E. Abbattista.

¹ See also DE GIORGI, *Paolo VI. Il papa del moderno*; ders., *Quale ri-generazione della chiesa*; NARDIN, *Paolo VI, Rosmini e i Rosminiani*.

² Marangon writes accordingly: "Si potrebbe quasi dire che nelle Cinque piaghe tutta la vita di Rosmini sembra condensarsi e assumere valenza simbolica". Cf. MARANGON, *Risorgimento della chiesa*, 71.

I. ROSMINI: LIFE, WORK, RECEPTION

Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855), originating from a distinguished aristocratic family from Rovereto, is one of the most impressive Catholic intellectuals of modernity. In his personality extensive erudition, an innovative theological and philosophical thinking, deep spirituality, the sensitivity to the Church's current social challenges and the practice of the Gospel following Jesus and the great saints of the Church are united. Thus Rosmini, together with people like Romano Guardini and Edith Stein, joins the ranks of the great theological and intellectual figures of the Catholic Church who preceded the Second Vatican Council and the post-Council era spiritually. Rosmini, who understood to philosophise on the height of the philosophy of German Idealism, which influenced him and which he looked into critically, unites the intellectual power of an Anton Günther with the spiritual power of a Romano Guardini and the practical-organisational power of his friend Don Bosco.

Rosmini's intellectual work comprises political, ethical, philosophical and theological writings; it unites a visionary theology of Creation while the theological question of God, however, never loses sight of the political and social realities. I wish to name the following works: *Il nuovo saggio sulle origine delle idee* (1830), *Principii della scienza morale* (1831), *Antropologia in servizio della scienza morale* (1831/32, published in 1838), *Il rinnovamento della filosofia in Italia* (1836), *Trattato della coscienza morale* (1839), *Filosofia della politica* (1837-1839), *Filosofia del diritto* (1841-1845), *Sistema filosofico* (1844), *Teodicea* (1845) and his last great main work *Teosofia* (1846 et seq., published posthumously between 1859 and 1874).

Among Rosmini's book the one that reached the highest acclaim and reception is *Delle Cinque Piaghe della Santa Chiesa* (1832-1833; published in 1848). In this work Rosmini calls for far-reaching reforms in the Church. At the beginning of his career he was one of those Catholic intellectuals and priests who enjoyed the confidence of the Vatican. Rosmini had high hopes for Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) who was said to be a reformer during the first two years of his pontificate and who held Rosmini in high esteem. The situation changed dramatically with the revolution of 1848. Pius IX's orientation took an increasingly restorative turn and Rosmini's writing on the five plagues of the Church ended up on the index in 1849. This happened not least because in it Rosmini clearly spoke out against political interference in the appointment of bishops (which appeared inopportune to the political powers protecting the Vatican). Rosmini bowed to the Vatican's objections with great humility and kept good relations with many church dignitaries until his death, in spite of the increasing hostility of the Jesuits amongst others. He was especially appreciated for his ascetic lifestyle and his unconditional commitment to the poorest in society of the time, but also for the foundation of the Istituto della carità (Rosminiani; approved in 1839), an order dedicated to the loving devotion to the other. In 1854, in spite or precisely because of the angry opposition of restorative theological circles, Rosmini received theological support through the decree *Dimittantur opera omnia*, which Pope Pius IX had commissioned personally. However, peace did not last for long and after Rosmini's death the attacks against his theology under the banner of Thomism, which was gaining more and more ground and was promoted by the Jesuit order, aggravated. In 1887 Rosmini's theology was condemned as heresy in its entirety through the decree *Post obitum* and was put on the index.

This measure radically restrained the theological reception of Rosmini's work, even though Rosmini who had countless personal relationships to important Catholic personalities from the

domains of culture and the Church, lived on as a spiritual example in the memory far beyond his order. His writings were not entirely forgotten and also read and perceived outside the church. Especially in the north of Italy an intellectually active Catholic milieu had emerged which came into bloom in the post-fascist era until the Second Vatican Council and even after. Its most important representative was probably Giovanni Battista Montini, the later Pope Paul VI (1963–1978) who knew Rosmini's life (and the gist of his work). Finally, the Second Vatican Council brought about the opening process which Rosmini had had in mind, albeit 100 years too late. Rosmini was rehabilitated and, after having been designated as a model in the encyclical *Fides et ratio* (1998),³ he was beatified in 2007.

II. THE FIVE PLAGUES OF THE CHURCH ACCORDING TO ROSMINI

The first plague identified by Rosmini, namely the *Separation of the people from the clergy in the public cult*, already shows how many of the reforms of Vaticanum II corresponded to Rosmini's ideas. The key to a deeper understanding of this and the other four "plagues" lies already in the title of the writing, which is about the five plagues of the *Holy Church*. Amongst the four classic *notae ecclesiae* (one, holy, catholic, apostolic) Rosmini chooses to focus on holiness. In the Bible the term holiness is linked to the name of God, the unpronounceable tetragrammaton YHWH. In this context holiness designates something inaccessible to human power which opens up a free space of encounter between the human and the divine devoid of all projections and constraints. As much as man may want to procure himself prestige and power by transforming the entire world into the functionalised mirror of his own longings and validity claims, as *human* he nonetheless remains constituted by an alterity whose occupation and usurpation would entail the loss of humanity and the transition to the uninterruptedly presentable mechanical (or to the unfree, depersonalised demonic).

In his political writings Rosmini has a clear view into the power mechanisms of his society, i.e. into all earthly power claims that cannot let anything out of their totalitarian control. In the political context, in which he pleaded for the unity of Italy in the Pope's custody, he thus imagines the church as the instance entrusted with the task to relativise earthly regimes and their egomaniacal autocracy in order to withdraw and protect human dignity from an ultimate political grasp. One might dismiss Rosmini's request as naïve insofar as the church was also a worldly power and maybe reinforced its own power claim even more than other political institutions by the use of sacral imagery. However, Rosmini's struggle for an instance serving as a corrective to human power has to be taken seriously as an attempt to purify the Church in order to make it remember its evangelical origins and display an alternative handling of power by subjecting itself to such a purifying process.

Rosmini's vision refers to a lovingly devoted Church serving the poor under the sign of the Cross which thwarts all human self-aggrandisement. Today Pope Francis in particular ties in with

³ JOHANNES PAUL II, *Fides et ratio*, Nr. 74.

Rosmini's great ideal of the Church.⁴ All plagues identified by Rosmini are inseparably linked to the Church's holiness which he vehemently demanded and which is inseparable from the renunciation of worldly power. According to Rosmini holiness is not a sacral space of exception, but, as the Cross precisely shows, can be experienced where no terrene claims of power and safeguards veil the openness to the transcendental and the other which is always implied by vulnerability.

If one considers each of the five plagues individually each designates the same step taken by the Church into mundane power entanglements linked to the renunciation of Christ and his death on the cross. The first plague, the *Separation of the people from the clergy in the public cult* (Divisione del popolo dal clero nel pubblico culto) does not only separate God's people from an important source of its spiritual existence, but also transforms the clergymen into administrators of *sacral power* which becomes their possession. When the agency which has the task to keep the Church space open to the encounter with Christ and to represent *him* (not itself) in its divine highness (which manifests in kenosis and in abandoning oneself) begins to glorify its own power it perverts the holiness of the Church. The second plague of the Church, the *insufficient education of the clergy* (l'insufficiente educazione del clero), points to this: In it Rosmini does not only speak about the badly formed clergy, but also about the wrong focus within future sacerdotal activities. The latter reveals itself in the fact that the clergy takes on administrative tasks primarily, thus turning into the functionary of *administrative power*.

It is no coincidence that the third plague, the *discord amongst the bishops* (La disunione de' Vescovi), is at the heart of Rosmini's critique. For the bishops have the task to particularly express the unselfish love and friendship of the Christian Church. The bishop in conjunction with the Pope is called upon to set back worldly interests and the associated factions and thus to make the holiness of the Church experienceable.

The fourth and fifth plague of the church are linked to particular forms of power: The *abandonment of the nomination of the bishops to worldly power* (La nomina de' Vescovi abbandonata al potere laicale) does not only subject the Church to *worldly power*, but also degrades the bishops to political functionaries and stakeholders. One might add that the critique of this practice particularly challenged and put into question the political agents of the time (not least those of the Austrian Empire). The fifth plague concerns the *economic power* and focuses on the *servitude of the ecclesiastical goods* (La servitù dei beni ecclesiastici). In this context Rosmini scathed the prosperity of the Church insofar as strictly speaking it does not stand in the service of the poor and the necessary maintenance of the clergy – in order for its members to be able to act free from economic constraints.

III. THE RESACRALISATION OF THE CHURCH AS A NEW PLAGUE

3.1 *The peculiarity of the holy: the holy as an opening and a sacral area of exception*

⁴ Cf. DE GIORGI, *Quale ri-generazione della chiesa nel rosminianesimo di Papa Francesco?*

If one resumes Rosmini's critique one sees that it is at the service of the idea of a renewal of the Church for the sake of its holiness. This holiness has a moral connotation on the one hand, in the sense of its capacity of free love, i.e. love that is not subordinated to other interests, but lives out of the overflow of divine love. On the other hand behind this concept there lies the idea that the entire Creation is opened onto Christ. This includes that nothing lives out of and for itself, that life in general and man in particular always oscillates between two subjects: one's own and that of Jesus as YHWH's representative. Jesus thus marks a radical opening of the subject, a sphere of tangibility, devotion, but also of exposedness and vulnerability. The holy is thus not to be fixated and definitely located, but is to be found in the pores of life, metaphorically speaking, where the latter points beyond itself and encounters Jesus' devotion.

3.2 *The sanctification of Creation in Jesus and his Church.*

This conception of holiness is opposed to a separate and thus defined and manageable sacrality. It might find its deepest biblical expression in Col 1,15-20 where the origin of the entire Creation in Christ, in whom divine abundance (i.e. the holy name YHWH) abides, is emphasised. This pericope comprises the radicalisation of the Pauline doctrine of justification, but also the transformation of the philosophical pantheism into the confession of faith in Christ as the abundance of God's name. Through his resurrection Jesus was recognised by the Father as the new Adam and thus as the new representative of man. Behind this lies the idea testified by Jesus' life that being is to be understood as being-for (pro-existence), that one always lives through and for the other. In Jesus' resurrection his being is recognised as a paradigmatic being-for and he hence becomes the image of the new Creation. Thus henceforth Adam is no longer *the* human, but Jesus instead, which again leads to the encounter of Jesus in every human. Paul extends this idea in Col (following 1 Cor 15,28): Jesus is not only the subject of man, but the face of the entire Creation, which is thus sanctified in Jesus – who expresses the devotion to the name of God YHWH. Unlike pantheistic (and metaphysical) conceptions, God and being do not coincide (ahistorically), but being becomes God's abide in and through Jesus and the history of God's people, in which Jesus is present. This shows the inner core of the sacerdotal calling: The Cross as the space of Jesus's devotion includes the abundance of the name of God and becomes the symbol and subject of the new Creation, which is sanctified in Christ's cross. However, the idea that the Cross takes the place of being does not simply change the ontological paradigm, but the paradigm shifts from an (atemporal) ontology into history, insofar as in the Holy Spirit the Cross calls to (historically situated) discipleship on the part of the Christians. Jesus as abundance of the name of God is not separable from his succession. The Church as Jesus' community of succession is called upon to sanctify what is itself sanctified by Christ, i.e. Creation under the sign of the Cross. Since Jesus is the abundance of all time Creation is sanctified from the start, even though the sanctification remains tied to the respective historical practice of succession. Thereby the past is sanctified in Jesus' future (parousia) which is liturgically made present. In this sense there is no Creation without Jesus and no Jesus (as saviour) without Church/succession and thus no Creation either. If the holiness of the church is clouded, the entire symbolic world collapses.

Thus it becomes apparent how central the idea of sanctification, which discloses the meaning of Creation (of which Jesus is the subject) in the first place, is on the one hand. On the other

hand it shows that sanctification is radically linked to kenosis – i.e. the being-for up until the Cross – of Jesus, in which the Church originates. However, if the Church is understood as a sacral and institutional space of exception or as a worldly bearer of power, this equals the betrayal with regards to Jesus' Cross and thus to the entire humanity and Creation.

3.3. From the holy to the virtuality of the sacred

Rosmini's concept of the sanctity of the Church is evangelic in the deepest sense of the word and was acknowledged with regard to its contents through the Second Vatican Council. The liturgy, the revelation in the divine word, the pilgrimage of the Church and its service to the world (with an option for the poor) are dedicated to the sanctification of Creation, toward which the entire life of the Church in Christ must be organically oriented.

Saint Paul VI, the Council Pope, was also dedicated to this form of the Gospel. Tragically, this grand concept of Church and creation was distorted by the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968), at the centre of which is the sanctification of human life. Paul VI acknowledged that the question of the beginning of human life is tangent to the notion of sanctity, which must never be reduced to a mechanical process.⁵ In doing so the fact was not adequately considered that for centuries preceding the Council the Church derived an infinite claim to power over the world from the idea that the world is sanctified in it. This claim even affects the most intimate dimensions of the body and sexuality. Thus the encyclical, in which the prophetic spirit of the grand Council Pope (and that of his heir Rosmini) was very much alive, could not be understood properly. Instead it was considered as a renewed claim to power of the Church, which contributed that the new spirit initiated through the Council was slowed down. The fact that the issue regarding the relation between sanctity and sacral power (in all its ambiguity within the clergy) was widely excluded took its revenge.

During the pontificate of *John Paul II* the concept of sanctity, which had been established by the Council under Montini (and Roncalli), changed. Wojtyła was the Pope of the New Evangelisation and grand images: From 1978 to 1990 his pontificate was devoted to the resistance to atheist communism violating the all-embracing sanctity of life (the crucial image being the attempted assassination of Wojtyła in 1981); from 1991 to 2000 his pontificate was dedicated to the effort of leading a missionary Church as a purified (and thus sanctified) force into the third millennium by founding it on Israel (the images of John Paul II praying at the Western Wall as well as his plea for forgiveness for the guilt the Church has brought upon itself remain unforgettable); from 2001 to 2005 Wojtyła was perceived as the Pope of peace and unconditional affirmation of life and the sacred dignity of man (his last Good Friday procession in 2005, which he watched from his window, will always be remembered). The last phase of his pontificate was perhaps the most impressive sign of an universal sanctity of life in the spirit of Rosmini (and Montini) – also including the weak, old and broken life.

⁵ The crucial problem arising from this point of view is that birth control by artificial methods (and their cause-and-effect-relations) cannot be in accordance with the openness from which life originates.

On the one hand the grand gestures of John Paul II and the global political main topics of his pontificate were a continuation of the concept of sanctity as understood by Rosmini, the Second Vatican Council and also Paul VI; on the other hand the church policy of John Paul II represents a clericalisation and sacralisation of the Church including a quasi-divinisation of the papal office and its curial administration. This (contradictory) development was Wojtyła's reaction to two threats to the Church that he saw: on the one hand atheist communism, on the other hand the libertarian west. The latter – in John Paul's view – had abandoned the concept of sanctity of human life by legalising abortion and divorce. Just like after the eradication of nobility in Poland, when the clergy preserved the national identity, a clergy equipped with new self-confidence and with the support of newly founded Movimenti should make the sanctity of the Church visible in defence against a world profaned through communism and libertinism. In this visibility the clergy was to initiate a new evangelisation. Priesthood, which had been strongly shaped by the idea of sanctity before the Council, was in a deep crisis, and from Wojtyła's perspective this fact proved to be obstructive for this missionary impetus.

In contrast, John Paul II wanted to give a new identity and a new missionary force to both – the office and the Church. However, massive aporias emerged rapidly. Following the Council, the Polish Pope considered priesthood as a service to the universal sanctification of life. But many of the new generation of priests were looking for a clear-cut and often also self-referential identity within the practice of sacral power. Yet, a return to the old sacredness of office and person proved to be almost impossible in a postmodern⁶ society. For postmodern global society, which is dominated by urbanisation, industrialisation, secularisation and multiple identities, is fundamentally uprooted and cannot *immediately* go back to its (in many cases rural) traditions. The form of loss of identity that comes along with this is increasingly being compensated through the creation of “brands” – virtual labels and identities that are constantly interchangeable without any reference to a living historical tradition. Therefore, wherever the Church intended to re-erect certain sacral positions they immediately turned into brands because the living traditional context was disrupted. As a result a clergy developed which no longer administered the “sacred” (as before the Council) or (as after the Council) sought to participate in the sanctification of the world through Christ in radical kenosis (of clerical power), but which wanted to establish, manage and control brands. In doing so some control over certain labels could be gained, but the ability to perceive the world behind the brands, and thus the real vulnerability and contingency, vanished. Due to this form of postmodern Church a transition from pastorality to virtuality gradually took place. An approach to contents beyond faded traditions can only be attained through the attentive view on the broken, the hurt and the marginalised. While these contents were continuously abandoned, the mere will to self-assertion revealed itself as the ultimate content to which this form of postmodern Christianity was attached.

In a time when identities are broken, plural and especially vulnerable this was the way to maintain (or re-erect) a certain façade, which proved to be a media bubble. This was particularly

⁶ Here the word “postmodern” is not used in the Lyotard sense, but rather as a description of an era when awareness of history under the banner of freedom, which characterised modernity, drifts to virtuality and thus into the loss of all history.

exemplified by the sacral functionaries who couldn't make any sense of the Gospel any more.

That way the Church lost its ability to perceive the new intellectual, cultural and social fragilities. It could hardly make use of its eroded, but not fully wiped out structures (parishes, monasteries, religious congregations etc.) in order to open up new spaces of encounter with those who seek and those in need in our culture.

3.4. *The four new plagues of the Church*

3.4.1. *The complete exclusion of laymen from joint responsibility for the Church*

Clericalism has become a predominant symptom of a virtualised Church which presents itself as a sacral Disneyland. This clericalism is not only represented by the "postmodern" clergymen (as described above), but also (and equally vehemently) by neoconservative laymen looking for an origin, which has never existed. It manifests itself in the fact that from its perspective the subject of the Church is a sacralised clergy (and some unconditionally subordinate believers and supporting politicians). According to this clericalism, laymen are to be excluded from any responsibility for the Church even though they launched some promising ecclesiastic renewal processes that were aimed at a stronger involvement of the baptised.⁷ In the past few decades basically all those bishops whose seminaries were crowded and who produced many priests made their career. In contrast, it was less important whether this came along with an enduring evangelisation and whether the new clergy showed any pastoral, social or spiritual competences. Furthermore, a very widespread symptom in many areas of Western Europe is the import of a foreign clergy, which is not able to understand the cultural sensibilities of a particular community. The People of God, in turn, have no co-determination right in the creation of bishops or priests and are generally not valued at all. It is only important that there are area-wide consecrated priests in the communities; many bishops who have no inner connection with their dioceses do not care whether they gather or diffuse their communities. Clericalism shows its full absurdity and virtuality when newly created bishops and priests randomly erased forms of spirituality and structures, which had been patiently built (often by laymen), purely and simply as a display of power.

3.4.2. *The claim to moral superiority as a legitimisation of sacralised power*

Another plague is the claim to *moral superiority* as a legitimisation of sacralised power. The

⁷ Such transformations happened in many parishes, preaching stations, basic communities, oratories etc. around the world in the course of the Council. They all have in common that they patiently make contact with the local cultures and present themselves as hospitable places that are not directly oriented toward dominance. In Europe and Latin America many laymen took on responsibility in parishes and basic communities, in Africa and Asia many catechists were responsible for mission stations etc. A lot of them followed the trend toward clericalism and opened the door for Pentecostalism (in Latin America), but also for a world aloof from religion (Europe).

crucial keyword for this plague is the completely undifferentiated condemnation of so-called “gender ideologies”, homosexuality, divorce etc. Some of the critique of the excesses of human self-determination, which is the guiding principle of occidental societies, are – of course – justified. But this critique often becomes immoral when it goes along with an ignorance of the fundamental value of (responsible) human self-determination and a lack of empathy with the traumas and processes of restless search that constitute the background of many contemporary debates and forms of life. Asserting the failure of certain forms of life is a means to highlight one’s own claim to moral superiority, which is being sacralised in order to restore the lost dominance within society. The Christian ethos that is being used in this is rarely translated into daily life and current cultural expressions; instead it is often reduced to polemical terms. In consequence a drastic deculturation of the Gospel happens.

3.4.3. *Sexual abuse*

There are even more dangerous manifestations of clericalism than self-sacralisation through moral superiority: trying to gain absolute *control over physical bodies*. The question should be asked whether the loss of the real (social, cultural and physical) body, in conjunction with its sacralisation, could lead to the consequence that injuries are perceived only virtually, any more. It doesn’t suffice to say that behind the cases of sexual abuse mainly against minors is “only” an immature sexuality of the offenders (though this is undoubtedly the case!). Furthermore, many of the abuse cases seem to be connected with a rigorous claim to power regarding the body of the other and with a virtualisation of all bodies – as the most extreme manifestation of the attempt to gain control over the corpus. This way sanctity is being perverted into some virtual sacrality, which doesn’t consider the body, but only desires even more control. To make matters worse the abuse of power through this virtual sacrality has been covered up systematically to prevent any damage of the “image” of sacral priesthood.

3.4.4. *Clericalism as patriarchal power and exclusion of women from the sphere of holiness*

The universal sanctification of man through the Church has undoubtedly led to a unique appreciation of women as well as to the idea of a self-determination which also includes women.⁸ Still there has been the tendency to create a secluded sacral body from which women continue to be excluded. The fact that women are still being excluded from priesthood because of the argument that as women they cannot represent Christ cannot be taken seriously from a theological point of view – in face of the basic sacrament of baptism.

Excursus: Women in Priesthood?

⁸ The entry of many women in the monasteries can be regarded as a revolutionary act towards self-determination in this sense in as far as by doing so women were no longer reduced to their roles as objects of male desire or as mothers.

In his apostolic exhortation *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994) John Paul II underlined with his very high papal authority the long and persisting tradition that women are excluded from priesthood. His successors Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis confirmed this “no”. In the context of this question theologians should see the necessity to identify (more fundamental) reasons why women were not admitted for priesthood in the first place. It is clear that women do not only have equal rights as men, they also take part in the same grace of baptism and thus in the holiness of Christ. The numerous argued historical or exegetical reasons for the exclusion of women from priesthood are scarcely convincing: If the twelve apostles were only men, they were also exclusively Jews; moreover, it should be noticed that the first witness of the resurrection (and thus *Apostola Apostolorum*) was a woman, namely Mary Magdalene.⁹ Also Paul knows Junia, a person he refers to as a female apostle (Rom 16,6).

If there is to be any progress in this matter, perhaps the question has to be asked whether it is only women who are excluded from priesthood or also men. This question may sound absurd at first, but if you look closer you could find some good reasons why it might be justified. In his equally famous and strange eunuch logion (Mt 19,12) Jesus points out that some turn themselves into eunuchs for the sake of the heavenly realm. This story is probably not about actual castration (there is nothing passed on about that), but rather about a kind of third sex represented by eunuchs, who cannot be categorised within the dichotomy male/female (on the social spectrum they ranged even below women). More accurate than the term “third sex” for eunuchs is the explanation that eunuchs transcended the most fundamental of the three classical ways of creating identity during Antiquity (Jew/goyim, free/slave, male/female); they existed without any gender identity.¹⁰ When Paul talks about dissolving all traditional identities in favour of a new being in Christ in Gal 3,28 he sums up the deeper meaning of Jesus’ eunuch logion.

The *basileia*, which also occurs in the eunuch logion, is connected with an abandoning of all previous identities and assertions. It is the radical transition to the holy name of Jesus indicating YHWH. The holiness does not represent a definable sphere on its own, but it marks the openness of creation towards Jesus, the fact that the baptised does not live himself and his identities, but remains radically open towards Christ. With regard to priesthood it can be said that in a *positive* way female virginity expressed a new identity in the sanctification of the body through universalization of love, which means through transcending the biological concept of maternity. In contrast the male virginity – the (symbolic) castration of man – expressed in a *negative* way that the *basileia* can transcend even the most fundamental form of human identity, namely the sexual identity. The consequence from this is not the notion of some asexuality of the “castrated” man, but a non-identity (or non-mundane identity) at the centre of the self, which does not annihilate the mundane identities, but puts them into perspective, makes them more dynamic and transforms them. In this sense one could argue that priesthood – at least in the Latin tradition,

⁹ There are solid reasons to assume that Mary Magdalene is also the first concretion of Jesus’ favourite disciple. Cf. K. APPEL, *Tempo e Dio, Aperture contemporanee a partire da Hegel e Schelling* (BTC 187), Queriniana: Brescia 2017, 185-188 and 202-210.

¹⁰ Which of course does not mean that they had no sexual longing and no sexuality!

which tried to preserve the original habit (for episcopacy celibacy is obligatory in all Apostolic Churches) – is accessible neither for women nor for men, but open for the *castrated* men as a sign of the Sacred/the Holiness as something which is absent and yet present, which cannot be expressed positively and thus cannot be governed (!). It is the subject of current discussions to what extent celibacy is an essential part of priesthood. However, it must be emphasised that from this point of view it is clearly more than a disciplinary or pastoral shaping of priesthood.¹¹

3.4.4. Continued: Clericalism as patriarchal power and exclusion of women from the sphere of holiness

From all this can be derived that a concept of holiness which excludes women from all holiness is against the spirit of the Gospel. There may be good reasons for the exclusion of women from priesthood, as mentioned above, but there is no sensible reason why women should be denied access to leading positions within the Church. From this perspective the clericalisation of leading ecclesiastic functions is not just a pastoral foolishness, but also a plague of the Church because it indicates an understanding of holiness, which is not adequate to the Gospel.

IV. POPE FRANCIS AND THE QUEST FOR A NEW HOLINESS OF THE CHURCH

With his notion of holiness Pope Francis is clearly rooted in the tradition of the Gospel, the Second Vatican Council and also Rosmini. He often points out that the holiness is to be found in the poor, the migrants and the marginalised. It is yet to be seen whether his pontificate will have an enduring effect on a reformation of the Church in terms of its holiness or whether the self-sacralising clericalism will be stronger at last (a clericalism which was shocked by the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI in as far as he de-sacralised the papal office). In any case the future of the Catholic Church, which is in a deep crisis in many parts of the world, as a universal enunciator of the Gospel is going to depend on a concept of holiness as it is developed in Rosmini's text *Delle Cinque Piaghe della Santa Chiesa*.

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¹¹ So if even the Catholic Church abstains from an obligatory celibacy in some of its eastern traditions (Greek Catholics etc.) for the sake of the Gospel, this shows an enormous flexibility, which could maybe be exemplary in regard to other questions.

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