

European Network of Research on Religion, Spirituality and Health

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Editorial

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

Spiritual care is becoming an increasingly relevant topic in the different health disciplines, also in medicine. In October 2011 the German IGGS (Int. Ges. für Gesundheit und Spiritualität) will launch a journal "Spiritual Care". The European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health (ECRSH) in Bern 2012 will also focus on this current topic. What is meant by "spirituality"? Does spirituality "just" reflect the spiritual or existential nature of man or is it related to the transcendent? An ongoing discussion is trying to illuminate this important question.

In the present newsletter Jacqueline Bee summarizes her doctoral theses on the relation of the gender from a theological and hermeneutical perspective. Thank you.

René Hefti, MD

Topic

"The First Couple and Post-Modernity. Study of the Original Relation and Dependence of the Gender in Post-Modern Everyday Life"

(Original German Title: "Das erste Paar und die Postmoderne. Studie zur ursprünglichen Beziehung und Abhängigkeit der Geschlechter in der Lebenswelt der Gegenwart").

Abstract of Dissertation in Systematic Theology, Jacqueline Bee, 2009

Background of the Study

Never before has so much research been done about gender issues and the complexity of relations discussed and reflected as in the present. Nevertheless: „rien n'est clair. Moins que jamais“ (Pelletier „Le mariage des chrétiens ...“, 156) – things have never been more uncertain than today. The main goal of this hermeneutical study was to search – in a phenomenological sense – for an answer to the question, if a creationally intended anthropology of the couple

can be derived from the Bible. If so, it would be compared to the postmodern understanding of gender diversity and -identity. This could help to reach a better understanding of the strongly troubled marriages in post-modern society.

Understanding of the Bible

It is necessary to mention that the study is based on the premise of the bible as the word of God. In post-modern society such understanding cannot be taken for granted anymore. But a decreasing interest in today's society does not automatically imply that the bible has lost its primary purpose as the word of God with practical implications for everyday life. In contrary, it is through the bible that "God speaks to us and we speak to God – even today" (Slenczka „Die Anbetung der Weiblichkeit Gottes und das Bilderverbot ...“, 128 – transl. by jb).

Key Finding: Basic Anthropological Script for Relation and Dependence of the Gender

Ontological and functional complementarity

One of the main findings of the study has resulted in discerning a fundamental, God-given anthropological script which defines in its basics, both relation and dependence of man and woman. Therefore certain fundamental elements are given and cannot be deliberately transformed and/or adapted to various socio-cultural norms and expectations, although it does not embrace the gender specific *being* as a whole.

Man and woman were created for a lifelong marriage which was not only to reflect the triune creator but which was anchored in the dependence on the creator as a constitutive necessity for building a solid, successful and lifelong marriage. Their createdness bounds them indissoluble to their creator and refers them relationally to him (see Michel "Der dreieine Gott und die Einheit von Mann und Frau", 217). Based on an absolute equivalence, the creational intention embraces an ontological as well as a functional complementarity: man and woman are created upon each other, they depend

on and complement each other (see Ware "Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God", 83). In post-modern society however everything under the sun is seen as being changeable „[a]lles unter der Sonne ist wandelbar“ (Lüpke „Lebensverheißung und Lebensformen ...“, 144). Even gender identity is considered solely as a socio-cultural structure and therefore subject to unlimited changes and modifications. One main reason for the instability of marriages in post-modern society has been discerned in the discrepancy between the permanent anthropological basic script and the apparent variability of the relation and dependence between man and woman.

Communication, Love and Fidelity: Anthropological Constants

Communication, love and fidelity can be recognized as anthropological constants. Considering the ontologically rootedness of relationality (see Bonhoeffer 1958, 41), communication, love and fidelity are important and indissoluble elements of it. Through them man and woman mirror in a worldly-immanent way their triune creator, who is the source of communication (Joh 1,1) and love (1Joh 4,7.9), which are inextricably linked and bound to God's fidelity (Jes 55,3) (see Mühling-Schlapkohl 2000, 322; Härle 2007, 266f; Jüngel 2001, 448; Piennisch 1995, 47; Schwöbel 1992, 43).

Furthermore, considering the existential boundedness and reference of men to his creator, the negation of God the creator and redeemer proves to be of equal importance, as it is only through and in him that the basic script for marriage can be realized in its originally intended all-embracing dimension. As a result men are limited to their human abilities. The claim in Ephesians 5,25 gives a glimpse of the consequences, where men are asked to love their wife in such a way, to be willing to die for her as Christ died for his church. Who would be willing to do this today?

Discrepancy between Creational and Post-Modern Understanding of Gender

This awareness of the fundamental necessity of God as the creator of man has been lost in post-modern society. Instead we find the claim for absolute freedom, which cannot be understood as a simple term but as the key to the understanding of the post-modern individual (Schwöbel "Imago Libertatis: Freiheit des Menschen und Freiheit Gottes", 227). This is linked to the negation of the ontological sinfulness of man. It is obvious that such negation makes the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ by which sin is finally overcome, superfluous, rendering the re-establishment of the relationship between God and man impossible. But it is only by this grounding in God the creator and redeemer, that man and woman will understand and be able to live marriage in its originally intended depth and fullness.

Discussion of the Key Finding

The discrepancy between the creational view and postmodern understanding of the gender is evident. Findings like those of Zulehner and Volz and several other researchers can be interpreted as them having touched the basic anthropological script. Consequently, they declare with a certain consternation: "The findings show with a systematical persistence that alterations in men are the fewer the closer the 'nucleus' of the person is touched" (Zulehner/Volz 1998, 15 - transl. by jb; see also Karle 2006, 79; König/Maihofer "'Es hat sich so ergeben' ...", 209). This 'nucleus' of men is the creational basic anthropological script. It constitutes man as well as woman in their innermost part of their gender being.

Recently, the very limited but growing empirical studies, pointing out gender-specific differences provide evidence of the basic anthropological script. Although, in order to help couples to (re-)gain stability and durability for their partnership it is crucial to reach to a renewed extensive and all-embracing awareness, as outlined in the study that – in contrary to the post-modern understanding – not everything under the sun is subject to change.

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Announcements

3rd European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health
May 17-19, 2012

in Bern / Switzerland

For further information see www.ecrsh.eu
Contact: René Hefti, info@rish.ch

Pre-Conference Research Workshop with Prof. H.G. Koenig
May 13-16, 2012

in Langenthal / Switzerland

For further information see www.ecrsh.eu
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