

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE: FROM ABUSE (POWER) TO 'SACRAMENT' (HUMAN DIGNITY)

### TOWARDS THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE GENITALS IN A PASTORAL HERMENEUTICS

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#### Abstract

*It is argued that sexual violence and rape (the abuse of power) has its roots in an understanding of sex and sexuality derived from the spiritual notion of intimate love (healthy sexuality) and responsible human decision making. In the theological design of a pastoral anthropology it is of paramount importance to link our being human to an understanding of human dignity that is less linked to a substantial understanding and more towards a qualitative and relational understanding. In this regard a pneumatological approach in practical theology comes into play. In order to move from abuse to sacrament in a pastoral hermeneutics of sexuality, the challenge is to reframe the genitals, i.e. a paradigm switch away from a rubberised penis (tool) and a pharmaceutical vagina (instrument) to a 'sanctified penis' and a 'sacramental vagina'.*

**Keywords:** Compassionate Intimating, Violent Sex and Rape, Sacramentality of Love and Penetration, Erotic Sensuality, Pneumatological and Inhabitational Model, Promiscuity; Taxonomy of Spiritual Practices, Human Dignity

Without any doubt the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will be a century marked by the debate on the meaning of sexuality, gender issues and the stance of the church on the meaning of human sexuality. The debate is already shifting from a pessimistic stance on sexuality (sexuality as a remedy, the classic *remedium* stance) to sexuality beyond the marriage and gender paradigm, to a liberated, free, individualised performance sexuality and need-satisfaction sexuality; from normative and procreative sexuality to experiential, recreational sexuality.

Giddens (1992:20) refers to plastic sexuality as sexuality emancipated from fixed social roles. This is a decentred sexuality freed from the needs of reproduction. This allows sexuality to be shaped by personal choice. It is designed for maximum freedom and minimum constraint. The implication is that the former marriage arrangement is no longer the framework for sexual and erotic experience, which has become a personal choice and a matter of individual satisfaction. This process can be called the democratisation of intimacy (Thatcher 1999:51).

Seidman (1992:5-6) refers to libertarian sexual ideology, where sex is viewed as a positive, beneficial, joyous phenomenon. Its expression is connected to personal health, happiness, self-fulfilment and social progress. Sexuality attains different meanings as an act of self-expression or pleasure, a principle of satisfaction and joy, a sign of affection, love or a procreative act. Sexuality within this paradigm is reframed by the current sport morale:

sex as a vehicle to enjoy life, finding happiness and as a kind of ‘athletic function’ within the bodily experimentation with genitals. Linked to libertarian sexual ideology is the notion of sexual romanticism. The latter affirms sensually pleasurable and expressive aspects of sex, while simultaneously emphasising the role of eros as a means to personal self-fulfilment.

What this debate about libertarian sexuality and sexual romanticism highlights is the question about an appropriate sexual ethics of love and its relatedness to personal, erotic, bodily expression (sensual intimacy). It also stirs the question of how sexuality and gender issues are related to norms values, meaning, the notion of human dignity and spiritual identity. The core question at stake is the following: *how then can human sexuality be reframed by a Christian spiritual understanding of the meaning and significance of sexuality in order to move away from the sport morale of free, recreational sex and democratised sex (self-experimentation), to a sacramental understanding of sex and sexuality as well as to the ‘sanctification of human genitals’?* In what way can a practical theological reflection on human dignity create a Christian spiritual paradigm for assessing the constructive and positive place of human sexuality within a pastoral anthropology? Can the notion of human dignity in theology help us to a better understanding of ‘sexual health’ and ‘humane sexuality’? In a nutshell, in order to get away from the pessimistic association of sex/sexuality as sinful and vulgar the following question should be posed in a practical theological approach: what is meant by a Christian spiritual approach to human sexuality? Can a spiritual reframing of sex, eros and sensuality help us to move from violent sex (promiscuity) to human sexuality?

### **Main Argument: Sexuality as the Aesthetics of the Human Soul**

Sexuality touches the very fabric of human life. My main argument will be that sexuality is part and parcel of our being human and functions as an expression of human intimacy. It is intrinsically connected to the ensoulment of the body and the embodiment of the soul (Louw 2005:1-19). Sexuality is actually a spiritual issue, because it expresses a person’s innermost being. It is a deeply felt impulse that drives one individual close to another, in a desire to create something that is greater than either of them can embody alone. In Knox-Seith’s terms, in the tenderness itself, in the intimacy, a boundary is crossed (2005:23). Within the realm of a human encounter, one becomes more than oneself; one becomes part of ‘an other’. Sexuality in this sense is an expression of the aesthetics of the human soul, and very specifically involves the creation of a ‘we-bondage’ that refers to a creative level of being. Sexuality is the search and longing for a counterpart as the loving mirror of one’s own identity.

- In a nutshell: human sexuality is a deep-seated human drive geared towards personal and existential need satisfaction as an expression of human and gender identity. It also represents the will to communion (the sensuous, erotic power to human fulfilment in bodily communion,) and the quest for intimacy (developing intimacy with a partner is a lifelong process oscillating between the reality of fulfilment and disappointment) expressed by sexual love.
- Human sexuality becomes dysfunctional when it becomes a defence against loneliness and the fear of rejection. It runs the risk of becoming ‘sick’, even violent, when it becomes a means to an end, i.e. to maintain power (abuse of power), to control and to get reassurance of identity, to prove oneself in order to hide the fear of failure (performance achievement), or as an instrument for selfish self-affirmation

(sexual narcissism; narcissistic self-investment) and a manipulated self-esteem (to overcome feelings of inferiority).

In order to move from violent sex (the abuse of power) to a sacramental understanding of sex, the interplay between sex/sexuality and the notion of human dignity in theology should be explored.

### **Human Dignity within a Practical Theological Approach**

The question of human dignity in theology can be approached from different angles. One could argue that all three are valid and have merit within a theological and pastoral anthropology.

- The constitutive approach: human dignity as related to the notion of creation: human beings as created in the image of God. Human dignity as related to ontology causes the question: Is there a substantial element in our being which requires to be treated with dignity?
- The functional/pragmatic approach: human dignity as related to doing functions. In this approach human dignity resides in different sexual acts and becomes merely a behavioural issue.
- The hermeneutical approach: human dignity as related to meaning within the dynamic network of interrelatedness and destiny (teleology). A hermeneutical approach does not view human beings from a pessimistic point of view, i.e. from the traditional anthropological notion of *corruptio totalis*. Neither does it view human beings from an optimistic point of view. It views human beings from a realistic and an eschatological point of view: namely from our new status in Christ. Human dignity and human rights should therefore be derived from the character of eschatology. "For Jesus, ethics is a consequence of eschatology..." (Schrage 1988:29); "...according to Jesus, it is the coming of God's kingdom that is to determine human conduct" (Schrage 1988:37).

The hermeneutical approach does not exclude the truth implied in the notion of humans created in the image of God, and the implications of Christology for a Christian anthropology regarding the unique value of our being human (human dignity). However, the option in this article for a hermeneutical approach implies the paradigm switch from a merely substantial approach to a more spiritual relational approach.

### ***Human beings' fundamental structuredness: created in the image of God***

Clearly, it is impossible to build an anthropology pertaining human dignity upon a single scriptural pronouncement. Genesis 1:26-28 (the creation of a human being in the image of God) and Genesis 2:7 (the creation of human beings, endowed with spirit) are traditionally viewed as the *locus classicus* for a biblical doctrine of human beings.<sup>1</sup> But it is doubtful

<sup>1</sup> Berkouwer (1957) concludes that both the terms 'image' (*tselem*) and 'likeness' (*demuth*) in Genesis 1:26-27 can be used as alternative terms and are not easily distinguished from each other. In his exposition of the human doctrine in Scripture, Wentsel (1987:593) declares that the terms 'image' and 'likeness,' explain each other according to the Hebrew parallelism and are virtually synonymous. The term 'image' literally indicates a portrayal or a silhouette. In his Anthropology of the Old Testament, Wolff (1973) contends that the meaning of this term should be sought in its Canaanite and Semitic origin and background, where the image of God indicates representation with special authority.

whether this scriptural information intended to develop an extensive and systematic doctrine regarding a theological anthropology.

In designing an anthropology for practical theology, we prefer to take the following hypothesis as our point of departure. The terms ‘image of God’ and *nēfēs* refer to the uniqueness of human beings as this is determined by their relationship with the living God. ‘Image of God’ refers to human beings representing God, while *nēfēs* indicates that the source for life is dependent upon God’s creative action and faithfulness. This has ethical, moral and doxological implications: human beings should focus upon God and display God’s glory so that the entire creation may become aware of God’s presence and grace. People, as living beings (*nēfēs*), are distinguished from animals because their entire life, their physical and spiritual uniqueness are determined by God. Both *nēfēs* and image of God thus refer to the spiritual dimension of human existence: human beings have a transcendent dimension to their existence. This dimension is decisive not only for the ultimate destiny of life (the telic dimension; of existence) but also for conduct in general. The spiritual dimension does not exclude the psyche and the body, but views them as vital components of existence before God.

### ***The Christological Approach***

K Barth’s<sup>2</sup> attempt to found anthropology on Christology, without allowing Christology to coincide with anthropology, implies the following:

- Human beings originate in God and for their being are truly dependent on God for their being (KD III/2 1948:167).
- On the basis of togetherness and partnership with Jesus, the meaning of human existence resides in predestination: God’s yes to man.
- Hearing the Word confirms the reality of human existence (KD III/2 1948:176). People are addressed by God and attain his/her humanity by the event of a Word.
- As a result of being addressed, people are called to react to the content of such an event, that is, to respond to grace. Hence, the notion of humanity and vocation.
- The fact of being addressed and being called creates a history through which the transcendental factor (grace) truly transforms our being.
- This transformation; within the concreteness of our existence, results in gratitude. To be human means to live with an attitude of thanksgiving. Gratitude becomes the act in which the “hearing of the Word” is enfolded and embodied.

Barth; views thanksgiving as the only form of complementariness between God and human beings. Gratitude is the essential human ‘task.’ People truly exist only insofar as they thank God (KD III/2 1948:203).

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<sup>2</sup> R Anderson in his book *On Being Human*, also links an anthropology to a Christology. Anderson’s basic hypothesis (1982:18) is that the foundation of any theological anthropology lies in the continuity between Jesus of Nazareth as the Crucified and Christ the Lord as the Resurrected. According to Anderson, the human ontological status, as determined by the Word, enables human existence to be transcended. When human existence is understood merely in terms of creation, there is the danger of a naturalistic determinism - human beings remain prisoners of their own natural potentials and genetic limitations. The danger of perfectionism also arises when people become prisoners of their improved or perfect behaviour. In contrast, Anderson contends that the Word of God is the transcendental factor and the determining dimension for the Ultimate. Creation out of nothing thus prevents determinism and perfectionism and makes people depend on God’s Word for their new potential: “that which we call human being is differentiated creatureliness; experienced as response to the creative divine Word” (1982:35).

In a practical theological reflection on anthropology and human dignity the contention and argument is that the purpose of scriptural Christology is not to serve as a typology for ideal humanity or even co-humanity, nor to function as a point of ontic identification between human beings and Christ, and thus also with God Himself, but primarily to describe the nature of salvation.<sup>3</sup>

Christology; has a transforming effect. It transforms a person into a new being (2 Cor 5:17), who is gradually being transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18). Christology, because of soteriology restores human beings to their original ultimate destiny, which is to glorify God. In this sense, Christology has ontic implications for anthropology. The incarnation does not allow a person to share in Christ's nature, but in His expiatory sacrifice. By sharing in Christ's redemption, the old person is transformed into a new being endowed with a very special vocation and responsibility. This responsibility<sup>4</sup> has implications for a Christian spiritual approach to human dignity.

According to Brinkerink's research, the concept 'responsibility' suggests a creative tension between 'must' (obligation) and 'can' (potential), without describing the exact nature of the obligation and potential. Both express the fact that being human implies having freedom, within which reason and volition play an important role. This interpretation of the concept responsibility enables us to conclude that, because of accountability, people are also moral beings. People are responsible 'to' but also responsible 'for.' To be human, means to be committed to someone and to live with a vocation to do something for someone. This vocation impacts on the quality of human dignity and how one treats human beings. It also helps us to include human sexuality as a vital part of human dignity.

This meaning of responsibility is important for a theological anthropology and the notion of human dignity. The basic notion in a theological anthropology for the praxis within practical theology is: *respondeo ergo sum* (Heinemann 1963:180): I respond (and am responsible) therefore I am. Responsibility presupposes the covenantal context of human existence, within which people are addressed by God's Word and are thus responsible to God. A person is a moral being with ethical obligations.

### ***The Pneumatological Approach (Charisma and Pneuma)***

*Pneuma* is often used as an alternate term to imply human existence in terms of an inner dimension and an awareness of the ultimate. Paul accentuates the term *pneuma* when he links human existence to our new salvific condition in Christ and to the reality of resurrected life. This link between the human *pneuma* and the work of the Godly *Pneuma* is

<sup>3</sup> When Christology is linked directly to anthropology via the incarnation, there is always the theological risk that the uniqueness of Christ's vicarious work will have only anthropological consequences. Christ then becomes only an ideal or model (typology) for perfect humanity. He no longer functions as a Mediator between God and human beings, bringing reconciliation between the two. On the other hand the link between a Christology and anthropology cannot be denied.

<sup>4</sup> The etymology of the concept 'responsibility' produces most interesting material which has important implications for a pastoral context. The root of the French *responsabilite*; and the English 'responsibility' comes from the Latin *spondeo* and the Greek *spendoo* (Brinkerink; 1976:208). *Spendoo* is linked to libation. It is defined as confirmation of an agreement on the grounds of blood having been shed; pledging by covenant; making promises and being committed to obligations. It thus appears that the concept 'response' is linked to commitments within relationships and to the restoration of bad relationships. 'Response' thus presupposes the juridical context, in which the addressee is accountable and in which the addressee is compelled to answer the addressor. The concept 'responsibility' presupposes that the addressee can answer and is able to give an account.

prominent in Romans 8:16. Because of this connection between the human spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Rm 8:23 (See.Guthrie1981:165) the notion of human dignity in a Christian approach should be assessed pneumatologically.<sup>5</sup>

It is through pneumatology, the indwelling presence of the living and resurrected Christ in us that people can discover and find their healed and transformed *humanum* (human dignity). This *humanum* is a gift of the Spirit and is displayed by Christians through the fruit of the Spirit (*charisma*). In a practical theology, the endeavour of a praxis approach is to enrich the network of human relationships by *charisma*. Charisma creates a spiritual practice through which human dignity is bestowed to every human being irrespective of race, class, gender or culture.

In a pneumatological approach human dignity is fundamentally a relational issue within the dynamics of human relationships. One cannot achieve dignity or earn it; dignity should rather be given to one through the quality and meaning of relationships within different cultural contexts. Dignity is something one receives within the space of intimacy (unconditional love without the fear to be rejected). Such a spiritual and relational approach<sup>6</sup> in practical theology includes virtues and an understanding of a taxonomy of spiritual practices.

### ***Human Dignity within a Taxonomy of Virtues and Spiritual Practices***<sup>7</sup>

In order to reframe human sexuality in terms of a Christian spiritual approach in the light of an anthropology determined by a pneumatological paradigm, sexuality should be connected to a taxonomy of virtues and spiritual practices. The argument with reference to the topic of the article is that sexuality is intrinsically a spiritual phenomenon, i.e. determined by belief systems, norms and values.

Virtues can be described as norms internalised in human behaviour. Virtue therefore refers to the disposition or attitude that moves an individual to sustain practices, which enables the agent to accomplish moral good. It motivates people and brings about integrity. It represents enthusiasm for life (enthusiasm = literally, God within us) and becomes a driving force that enables one to establish and nurture life-giving and healthy relationships. It safeguards human dignity and brings about a human space of moral soulfulness. Sound values are part and parcel of spiritual health.

It was Aristotle who underlined the importance of virtues for purposeful actions. To this end he identified four basic virtues – prudence, justice, temperance and courage.

The idea of identifying some of the most basic virtues in spirituality is to help one to understand that directedness and morality are important ingredients of spiritual formation. They determine the quality of human behaviour.

The following represent basic virtues in spirituality: charity; prudence; compassion; patience; trustworthiness/humility; fidelity/faithfulness; fortitude and courage; temperance; integrity/sincerity; embodiment and physical fitness (bodily care and respect). Within an

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<sup>5</sup> According to Rebel (1981:9-13) reformed theology enabled psychology (with its emphasis on the *humanum*;) to dominate the scene of practical and pastoral theology;. This was a result of reformed theology's under-estimation of human beings in the presence of God and the poor attention paid to the relation *pneuma*; and *humanum*.

<sup>6</sup> For a relational approach, see Sherlock 1996:158-160. "The affirmation of personal human dignity is understandable only in the light of my relation to others, and both they and I are embraced in, through and by Christ" (160).

<sup>7</sup> See Sperry 2002:57-92.

integrative understanding of Christian spirituality and a holistic approach to human sexuality, the expectation is that the previously mentioned virtues will help human beings to create in the praxis of daily living and within the dynamics of human relationships a kind of spiritual praxis that will determine all human behaviour as well as the quality of human decision-making and responsible choices. And this is what sexuality as a spiritual endeavour is about.

### **Taxonomy of Spiritual Practices**

The following spiritual practices are at stake in a spiritual understanding and holistic approach to human sexuality:

- Purifying motivation;
- Cultivating a true discernment (wisdom);
- Living ethically;
- Developing a peaceful mind;
- Recognising the sacred in all (vision);
- Finding meaning and purpose in life;
- Cultivating compassion and sensitivity;
- Engaging in the service of others.

The above-mentioned practices have the advantage of transforming one's daily activities into spiritual practices. In order to persevere, one needs basic capabilities or virtues. Because spiritual practices have to do with the notion of living ethically, spirituality includes moral character, i.e. that which gives orientation, direction and shape to our lives (Sperry 2002:70).<sup>8</sup>

It will now furthermore be argued that human sexuality, derived from its spiritual value and separated from the interplay between human dignity and the Christian ethics of sacrificial love, is easily exposed to the abuse of sexuality, i.e. sexuality as merely a power play to maintain or to gain power. This notion of sexuality easily leads to the abuse of sexuality and violent sexuality. With violent sexuality is then meant: sexuality separated from fidelity, trust, intimate love and honest commitment, i.e. from a taxonomy of spiritual practices. Violent sexuality is merely a variant of promiscuity.

### **Promiscuity: The Violence within Human Sexuality**

In order to get a better profile of what is meant by the crisis of violent sexuality, as well as what is meant by the crisis of promiscuity in human sexuality, the following vital question should be posed in order to identify the basic issues at stake in an understanding of what sexual promiscuity is about.

Is the traditional Christian marriage the framework for sexual and erotic experience, or does the relational and systemic understanding of sexuality and its interconnectedness with human identity, dignity and a taxonomy of spiritual practices provide the framework for a constructive and positive understanding of what is meant by humane sexuality irrespective of marriage?

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<sup>8</sup> Moral character, according to Sperry, is related to habit and virtue. Habits are regular patterns of activity; virtues are perfected, rightly ordered habits, while vices are perfected, wrongly ordered habits (Sperry 2002:70).

The connection between sexuality and a bonding relationship of trust, i.e. of fidelity<sup>9</sup> and faithfulness (the notion of commitment) is of vital importance because outside this spiritual framework human sexuality is exposed to the reality of promiscuity. Human sexuality implies therefore more than merely being a cultural phenomenon.<sup>10</sup>

In order to understand promiscuity the following questions are at stake. Can one separate sexuality from self-esteem, communication and love? Does sexuality determine love or does the quality of love define sexuality and mould it into a human endeavour? Is the body the object of sexuality, or is sexuality determined by the quality of our embodiment (humans do not have bodies; they are their bodies)? How is sexuality related to power and control and when do the beauty and art of sexuality become the ugliness of exploitation and violent self-satisfaction?

The previous questions and remarks help us to define the crisis of human sexuality namely promiscuity.

- Promiscuity points towards free sexual expression without any limitations, boundaries, norms, values separated from the gender paradigms of male and female, as well as from love and intimacy.
- Promiscuity is biological functionalism divorced from ethics and aesthetics and a forceful (even sometimes a violent) means to express power and control. By promiscuity is meant sexual immorality and infidelity, i.e. misusing sexuality for immoral purposes (*porneuo*) (Reisser 1975:497-498), including illegitimate intercourse. Furthermore, promiscuity refers inter alia to adultery, prostitution, fornication, and unchastity.
- Promiscuity implies the rejection of the other by switching trust into distrust and unfaithfulness, and bondage into selfish experimentation and the abuse of the other for self-gratification. Sexuality without commitment and personal responsibility, i.e. deliberate infidelity, leads to promiscuity. The sex act becomes promiscuous and exposed for abuse and rape: violent sexuality.
- When the sex act is instrumentalised by functional and contextual experiences without the awareness of the unique, individual self-understanding of the human I as, inter alia, a sexual being within the act of choice and decision-making. Promiscuity is a narcissistic focus on the sexual organs as merely instruments of lust, isolated from the human I and a sound value system. With reference to campaigns for condomising (rubberised sex); the tendency to safeguard the sex act against pregnancy by means of pharmaceutical means, the danger surfaces for sexuality of becoming more and more a merely biological and functional endeavour.
- Promiscuity comes into play when the sex drive is separated from destiny, meaning and value, i.e. when sex is an instrument to mechanise the human body into a 'thing',<sup>11</sup> into a penis and vagina (object) (morphology of an organ, and the

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<sup>9</sup> Fidelity seems to be an important component of the spiritual meaning of sexuality. "Fidelity and infidelity are seldom found in the table of contents of psychological textbooks or even in tracts on marriage" (Kennedy 1980:82-93).

<sup>10</sup> Grenz 1997:110: "The most fundamental of these is the assertion that the context of the sex act is determinative of its meaning." The meaning of the sex act is then in principle dependent on the context in which persons engage in it. Inevitably culture cannot be excluded from the debate: "The larger culture continues to provide the adolescent with a bombardment on inconsistent sexual messages, and the obstacles and contradictions are often mysterious and confusing" (Godow 1982:297).

<sup>11</sup> "When the body is experienced as a thing, it has the right to live only as a machine owned by the self" (Nelson 1978:41).



genitalisation of sexual feelings), isolated from the human I and the I of the other. (The mechanisation of the human body and its organs.)

- When sex and sexuality are isolated from love as an expression of self-respect and the respect for the other.
- When sexuality becomes an end in itself without any meaning for the person (the depersonalisation of sex). Sex and sexuality then do not convey meaning and personal significance, but mere bodily function.
- When sexuality is separated from moral decision making and the ethics of responsibility, so that it becomes a means to express anger, human frustration and violent exploitation of oneself and the other (violent sex). This links with the tendency to isolate sexuality and sex from its aesthetic dimension, i.e. creation, enjoyment and procreation. Sexuality becomes no more than brutal control and the abuse of power.

### **Healthy Sexuality and Sexual Love: Towards the Sanctification of the Penis and the Vagina**

According to Nelson (1990:1157), the introduction of love implies that sexuality is related to ethics. A sexual ethic centred in love can express itself in various values or criteria by which specific sexual acts might be measured. All human beings are sexual from birth until death, and all sexual acts and expressions are embedded in ethics (love) and aesthetics (completion and fulfilment).

Sexual love (see also Nelson 1990:1157) has several features:

- It is self-liberating, expressing one's own self-affirmation and desire for growth. Without positive self-love and a mature stance in life, however, genuine intimacy is impossible, for intimacy depends upon each person's sense of self-worth and emotional, as well as spiritual maturity.
- It is bodily related (embodiment of sexual love). Sexual love is connected to sex and to biological drives. The primary aim of sex is pleasure, recreation and reproduction. It includes the important dimension of the satisfaction of the sex drive, and eventually at some stage, intercourse.
- Sexual love includes mutuality and is therefore other-enriching and other-empowering, displaying a genuine concern for the well-being and growth of the partner or spouse. In this regard sex is a search for completion of the human person through an intimate personal union of love expressed by bodily union (Ashley and O'Rourke 1989:200).
- Sexual love should be honest and convey trust. It should express as truthfully as possible the meaning of the relationship between the partners.
- Sexual love implies commitment, committing oneself faithfully to an ongoing relationship. Positively, Christian sexual ethics affirms marriage as a covenant of love, always in process. It is centred in fidelity: the bonding of trust, honesty, mutual care and primary commitment (Nelson 1990:1157).
- Authentic sexual love implies responsibility, which includes a social responsibility. It should express values that enhance the larger community and is sensitive to cultural values.
- Sexual love should be geared towards life fulfilment and the healing of life in order to prevent estrangement, rejection and isolation.

- In this regard Kennedy (1980:16) refers to healthy sexuality as the seeking of erotic pleasure in the context of tenderness and affection. Pathologic sexuality is motivated by selfish needs for reassurance or relief from non-sexual sources of tension. Healthy sexuality seems both to give and receive pleasure; neurotic forms are unbalanced towards excessive giving or taking (compulsion and obsession). Healthy sexuality is constructive and discriminating as to partners and gender; neurotic patterns often tend to be non-discriminating, not taking diversity and difference into consideration. Healthy sexuality relates erotic tensions to the context of affection. Neurotic sexual drives, on the other hand, are triggered less by the erotic needs than by non-erotic tensions and therefore more apt to be compulsive in the patterns of occurrence.
- Sexual love should be joyous (exuberant in the appreciation of love's mystery, life's gifts and the playfulness of good sex – the human being as a *homo ludens*). In this regard sexuality includes sex as a search for sensual pleasure and satisfaction, releasing physical and psychic tensions.
- Love-centred sexual ethics are inseparable from reconciliation and justice. The focus is mutual empowerment rather than dominance and exploitation.
- Human sexuality is embedded in imagination (the aesthetics of constructive fantasies) and creation. It is always linked to the creative engagement of procreation. The potentiality of procreation and parenthood can never be excluded from the meaning of the act of sexual expression. Humans become in this regard co-creators with God the Creator.
- Love-centred sexuality should be spiritual and therefore aware of our human quest for meaning and dignity. Within Christian spirituality one can say that sexuality should be sacramental, i.e. an expression and symbol of the peace of God's presence and sacrificial grace. In this regard sex is a gift of God.<sup>12</sup>

The Hebrew word to express sexual intercourse, *jada* refers to personal communication and mutual acknowledgement. If one paraphrases this meaning, intercourse is meant to establish, on the level of deep personal communication, a commitment towards one another that will enrich. Coitus becomes perverse and vulgar when it is merely an act of copulation, i.e. one person doing something to another. Coitus is rather meant to disclose personal knowledge,<sup>13</sup> spiritual knowledge; it is about 'ensoulment' within the reality of 'embodiment.' The sexual relationship therefore entails more than mere 'gratification'. Sexuality in terms of the act of sex is an expression of validation, love, commitment and personal affirmation. Within a spiritual perspective, intercourse and coitus should be understood as 'sacramental', i.e. as an expression of a unity or bondage that enfleshes God's grace in such a way that the mutual love in the sex act constitutes a bond of fidelity and trust. Ultimately, sex in itself is 'holy', symbolising a unity of permanence, somehow revealing the salvific order of reconciliation. Spouses should love each other as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

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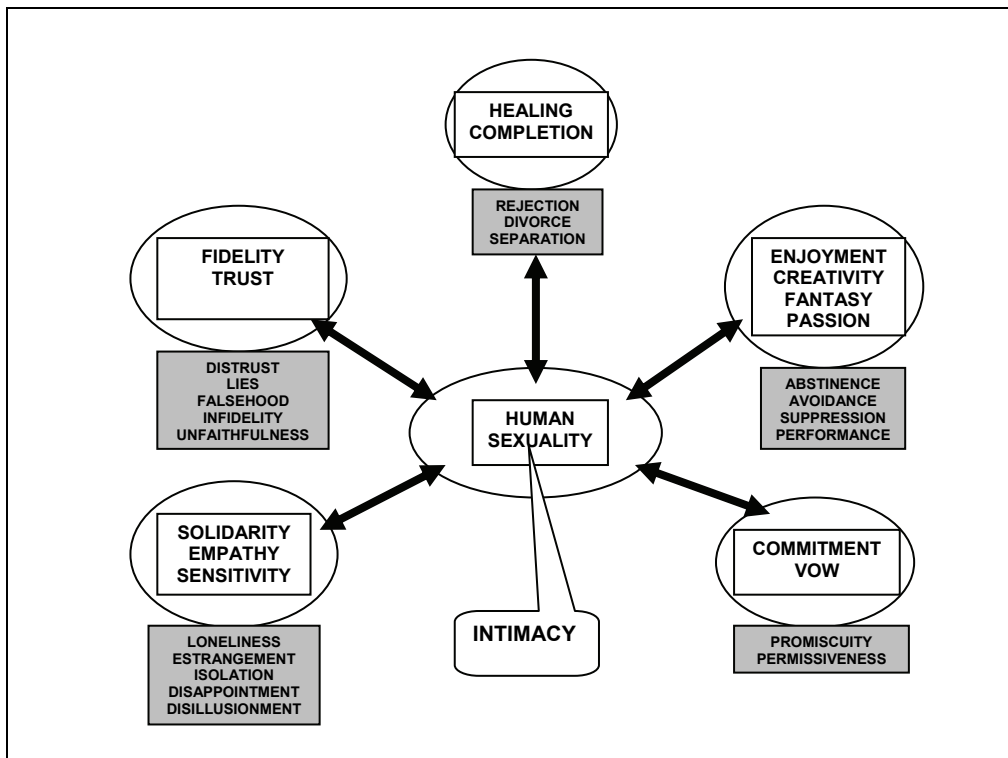
<sup>12</sup> "It is the most personal, intimate, and sacramental outward expression of the inner physical and spiritual love which God has given. Sexual intercourse within Christian marriage is the highest symbolic act which our mortal bodies are capable of performing, and as such represents worship and thanksgiving to the God of love who created us" (Hyder in Vayhinger 1990:1149).

<sup>13</sup> "A man and a woman who know each other sexually enter into a communion that is far more than physical" (Crook 1995<sup>2</sup>: 110).

- Love-centred sexuality in a Christian, spiritual and incarnational or inhabitational approach, should affirm embodiment. In the past, and within the Christian tradition of a theological approach, in order to argue for the positive, constructive value of human sexuality as intrinsic to the divine-human relationship, the incarnation of Christ has usually been introduced in order to affirm the importance of our bodies.<sup>14</sup> In this regard, I would rather opt for a pneumatological and inhabitational model.

The following diagram portrays the gist of our argument, i.e. that sexuality in a pastoral hermeneutics should be regarded as sacramental. The diagram is designed to help ministers and pastors in the pastoral ministry understand the systemic dynamics of human sexuality in order to promote a ‘healthy understanding’ of human sexuality. It is within this realm that the human genitals become ‘ensouled’ and are viewed as integral components (not tools and objects) of an ‘ensouled’ human embodiment.

*Different life and ethical dimensions of human sexuality in a pastoral hermeneutics<sup>15</sup>*



One should realise immediately that sexuality can never be understood without taking into account the dangers of rejection, avoidance/abstinence, promiscuity, estrangement/disappointment and infidelity.

<sup>14</sup> See in this regard the argument of Nelson (1990:1156) for a Christian understanding of sexuality.

<sup>15</sup> The presupposition behind the identification of the different life and ethical dimensions in sexuality is that in a spiritual, eschatological model the following dimensions of human sexuality are paramount: The dimension of healing and completion; enjoyment and creativity; commitment and vows; solidarity; empathy and sensitivity, and trust and faithfulness.

In my view, the core issue and basic human need in all forms and modes of sexuality and sexual activities is the notion of intimacy: the need to be accepted unconditionally for who you are, without the fear of being rejected. Intimacy creates an atmosphere of acceptance and security. Safe sex is more than 'condomising'; it is about 'compassionate intimating'.

The notion of compassionate intimating represents the dynamics of embodiment and the assertion that the human body is more than biology and physicality. The human body in its corporeality is temporal and spatial. The human body should therefore be read and treated as a bodily space for the nurturing of intimacy and a corporeal place for the location of 'soul' within the reality and existential event of an encounter. This bodily and embodied space provides the position and container for the expression of sexuality.

Body entails more than organic biology consisting of a concrete, material, animate organisation of flesh, organs, nerves and skeletal structure, which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and form through the physical and social inscription of the body's surface (cf Grosz 1995:104). The body becomes a subjectivity in the event of the encounter with the other and, ultimately, with the Other. This is the same with sex. Sex (sexual impulses and drive, libido) becomes the subjectivity of sexuality in the event of the encounter with the other and, ultimately, the Other. Sexuality as space and place for a human encounter represents the expression of sexual hopes, wishes, sensual desires, pleasure, behaviour, ethos, norms and values within the domain of sexual difference and the morphologies of bodies.

## **Conclusion**

My argument is that the space and place of sexuality<sup>16</sup> constitutes a creative space and place for intimacy and the fostering of humane sexuality. Human sexuality should therefore be valued as a deep spiritual encounter between human beings: sexuality as a spiritual space for enrichment and the fostering of meaning. The core spiritual dimension is intimacy: the grace of unconditional acceptance and the affirmation of agape love. The ingredients or dynamic components of this space, this network of social and cultural and spiritual bipolarities, are listed below. (The bipolar dynamics indicate that all aspects of human sexuality are always present as real options. At the same time the options are materialised within the danger zones of real threats that can rob sexuality of its humane meaning and significance).

- Intercourse as an expression of human dignity: sexuality as personal communication, as disclosure as well as affirmation of human identity (mutual empowerment) within the danger zone of dehumanisation and humiliation (sexual manipulation).
- Ecstasy and the pleasure of recreation and enjoyment: sexuality as need satisfaction and the urge for orgasmic fulfilment within the danger zone of the abuse of power, violent sex and rape.
- Therapy and healing: sexuality as the healing experience of wholeness and completion (dimension of growth and spiritual maturity) within the danger zone of separation and painful rejection.

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<sup>16</sup> On body identity and the reconstruction of sexuality because in the current public debate sexuality is de-linked from marriage, see Castells 2004:294-295.

- The sacramentality of love and penetration (the symbolic meaning of the penis and the vagina): sexuality as responsibility, unconditional acceptance, sensitive understanding, openheartedness (integrity), affirmative appreciation, and loyal respect within the danger zone of resistance, enmity and hatred.
- Vocation and the vow of commitment: sexuality as the mystery of procreation, nurturing and family building within the danger zone of forced abstinence, unwilling/undesirable celibate and artificial cohabitation.
- Erotic sensuality: sexuality as sensual experience; as embodied unity (the spiritual dimension of shalom); an event of mutual embracement, and an embodied sense of belongingness within the danger zone of promiscuity and experimental copulation.
- Permanence and continuity: sexuality as trust and the expression of the ethical yes and the guarantee of the enrichment of human relationships within the danger zone of distrust, permissiveness and divorce.

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