

Razprave

Pregledni znanstveni članek (1.02)

BV 74 (2014) 1, 7–28

UDK: 272-42

Besedilo prejeto: 04/2014; sprejeto: 05/2014

*Eberhard Schockenhoff***On the ethos of theology: A science of faith between the Church and secular society***“I try to help mature Christians strengthen their capacity for making moral judgments rooted in faith.”*

Eberhard Schockenhoff

Abstract: The aim of moral theology is not to teach people normative rules of conduct in life but to enable them to correctly understand moral principles and make moral judgments in their lives based on the Christian faith. Theology is a science that studies the faith, revelation and tradition of the Church. Moral theology is a branch of theology that focuses on the principles of ethical conduct in the light of the Scriptures, particularly the Gospel. It is thus faced with the need to harmonize biblical ethics and modern scientific findings, which is often difficult to achieve. Moral theologians, much like other scientists, engage in teaching, research, and public discourse. Their ultimate aim is to show modern Christians how to lead their lives, be involved in modern culture and help modern society resolve conflicts; they should therefore teach their students in this perspective and not just theoretically.

Key words: theology, moral theology, morality, ethics, teaching, research, public discourse, Christianity, Holy Scriptures

***Povzetek:* O etosu teologije: znanost o veri med Cerkvijo in sekularno družbo**

Cilj moralne teologije ni, učiti ljudi normativnih pravil ravnanja v življenju, ampak jim omogočiti pravilno razumevanje moralnih načel in jih usposobiti za moralno presojo v njihovem življenju, za presojo, ki je v skladu s krščansko vero. Teologija je znanost, ki preučuje vero, razodetje in izročilo Cerkve. Moralna teologija je veja teologije, ki je osredotočena na načela etičnega vedenja v luči Svetega pisma, posebno evangelijev. Tako se sooča s stalno potrebo po harmonizaciji biblične etike in sodobnih znanstvenih dognanj, a to je pogosto težko doseči. Tako moralni teologi kakor drugi znanstveniki se ukvarjajo s poučevanjem, z raziskavami in z javno razpravo. Njihov prvi cilj je, pokazati modernim kristjanom, kako naj živijo svoje življenje, se vključujejo v sodobno kulturo in pomagajo moderni družbi pri reševanju napetosti. Zato naj moralni teologi tudi učijo in vzgajajo svoje študente v tej perspektivi in ne zgolj teoretično.

Gljučne besede: teologija, moralna teologija, morala, etika, poučevanje, raziskave, javna razprava, krščanstvo, Sveto pismo

The Italian author and literary critic Claudio Magris, in his novel *The Danube: the Biography of a River*, describes a journey that took him from the source to the mouth of the river. Travelling the nearly 3000-kilometer course of the river, Magris discovers numerous cultural sites where today's traveller can encounter the roots of European culture. In an antiques shop in Prague he comes upon two volumes, in Latin, of Dr. Joseph Kachnik's *Etica catholica (Generalis and Specialis)*. Kachnik was professor of moral theology at the Theological Faculty of Olomouc in Moravia, where the book was published in 1910. Magris later describes his impressions upon looking through the book as follows: "The manual of Doctor Kachnik is a tract, with no pretence at originality, which simply aims at spelling out the teaching of the Church while discussing a great many forms of human behaviour, the problems to which they give rise, the norms and prescriptions that must be respected in given circumstances. In the course of the work, Kachnik investigates and classifies the forms of freedom and the necessity of action, the order and the nature of human and religious laws, duties and exceptions, deviations and habits, circumstances and passions, the differences between different sins and virtues, cases of adultery and the phenomenology of intoxication, moral and civil values, impediments, attenuating and exacerbating circumstances, the forms of fantasy that can throw the conscience into confusion and the treacherous self-deceptions with which the conscience tries to get round itself."

Although the author of this remarkable book seems to Magris to be not quite free from a certain comic pedantry and from a naïve clerical narrowness, he praises the psychological sophistication with which the author treats the handling of the scrupulous conscience. To judge by the amount of space this manual of moral theology dedicates to this abnormal development of conscience it would seem to have been a widespread phenomenon at this time. While Magris found the distinctions used in the book to describe different forms of behaviour quite strange – he noted that sinful acts got a lot more attention than praiseworthy ones – he found the practical suggestions that were offered to the confessor in his dealings with the scrupulous penitent quite convincing. In particular, the manual warns the confessor "to be patient with the over anxious, but quite strict with their phobias; to give them the assurance they need, but then to prevent them from indulging in their obsessive and self-centred guilt feelings; to prevent them during confession from laying out all their obsessions and presumed sins, especially in the case of shameful acts." Due to a great familiarity with the depth and lack of depth of the human psyche the scrupulous were challenged to overcome the love of being alone, which they wrongly took to be a sign of spiritual depth, and to rather seek relaxation in conversation and different kinds of company. These are in fact – on this point of practical wisdom the moral theologian even quotes Goethe's Mephisto – the essential steps to be taken in order to recover from the problem.

As far as the term *theologia moralis* is concerned, the history of our discipline goes back as far as the 16th century; however, with regard to the matter treated it is much older. In this sense the manual of Dr. Joseph Kachnik is a moral theologi-

cal publication of a relatively recent date. Yet I can barely imagine that the author of the work, whom I had not previously heard of and which fell into the hands of a poet of our time, belongs to a discipline that I teach in 2010, just 100 years later. The very question as to what he is doing when he does moral theology would have seemed very strange to the author of this work. Reflecting on one's own doing is a modern phenomenon, which shows the current lack of security in our discipline. Had Dr. Kachnik understood the question, however, then his answer would presumably have been that he sought, through his manual of moral theology, to help confessors exercise the art of directing souls in a combination of doctrinal reliability and pastoral kindness. His manual was intended to reach the conscience of the faithful through the confessor and to guide the former to right action.

I received a similar answer as a young doctoral student when I was presented in the Tübingen Halls of Residence to the then Papal Nuncio, "You are preparing yourself for an important task," he said to me, "teach the seminarians a solid moral theology so that they can instruct the people about how they should live." With an undertone of warning in his voice he added the Latin proverb: *parvus error in initio, magnus in fine*, a small error at the beginning leads in the end to major errors. I had the impression that he wanted to make me aware in this way of the special responsibility I would bear as a future moral theologian, in that I would be accountable not only for myself and my own behaviour, but also for the behaviour of the faithful. All too easily these latter could be led unawares along wrong paths through erroneous moral theological opinions.

In face of the concern on the part of the Papal Nuncio, I had to smile because he seemed to me to greatly overestimate the effective influence of moral theology on the lives of the people. Still, I was moved by his almost naïve belief that moral theological reflection could exercise such a direct influence. As I now look back on what I have done as a moral theologian, I think I can understand better than I did then why the warning of the Nuncio on the one hand moved me because of the genuine concern it expressed and on the other bewildered me because of its otherworldly naivety. The problem with his approach is not its conviction that moral theology should help guide people to a convinced and persuasive form of Christian life but rather its belief that this goal can be achieved at a merely doctrinal level at which we teach people how they are to live. In any case, strictly speaking, this hierarchical model of instruction needs an intermediate stage where moral theology first teaches priests and ministers how the faithful should live, in order that the priests and ministers can then correctly instruct the faithful.

This view is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between moral theology and the practical everyday life of the faithful. It is not in fact the task of moral theology to take over the role of judging what is to be done by telling people what they have to do, but rather to help them to come to their own judgements. In place of a doctrinal model of instruction, which would define the task of moral theology as teaching what is morally right, we can have a ma-

ieutic understanding of ethics. In this view, moral theology understands itself as a form of midwifery that builds upon the capacity of the faithful for judgement and tries to help them toward a reflective understanding of their vision of life. It tries to guide those it addresses to their own moral awareness and, in terms of this image, accompany the development of an autonomous conscience capable of reflecting on its own ways of thinking. Moral theology communicates knowledge about practical living, which makes it possible for people to understand and act according to what they themselves have recognised as right in terms of their view of life. It attempts to replace the form of morality that is passed on through tradition and consists of a more or less automatic participation in the life of the Church. Such forms of morality normally do not live long in the face of opposition from the world and its different way of life. They need to be replaced by a personal, internalized practical knowledge of what to do on the basis of an independent capacity of judgement.

My first answer as to what I am doing when I do moral theology could therefore be: I try to help the students who attend my lectures or seminars to develop their capacity to judge what is right and wrong in issues that arise from their personal lives or their professional, civil and political activities. In other words, I want to lead them toward an independent use of their practical reason and to enable them to live confident Christian lives in secular culture. In addition to a free decision to adhere to the faith they need an alert critical awareness that is able to interpret and differentiate the signs of the times. The Second Vatican Council uses these terms not to promote a superficial conformity to cultural trends but rather to accept in "timely untimeliness" the challenges and conflicts of the present time, without falling into prejudices, banalities and ideological deformations of a given cultural context.

In order to reach the goal I am aiming at when I do moral theology I have to teach the students of this subject numerous elements of theoretical knowledge. They should get to know and understand different styles of ethics, different fundamental normative theories, their own moral tradition and the important insights of the human sciences (humanities). This approach to teaching should make it possible for them to understand better the empirical bases of moral phenomena: the development of conscience and its different forms, the unfolding of human identity, the human capacity for guilt, the range of free will etc. Important as these theoretical capacities are in the context of the academic work of a university, they are inadequate for the education of future priests, teachers of religion or pastoral assistants. It is not enough for these to be informed of various ethical theories and be able to solve complicated moral dilemmas. Rather, when I do moral theology, I want to help them toward a deeper understanding of the meaning of the Christian faith and enable them to see its normative implications for their own lives and behaviour, which can only happen if it is clear what I as a moral theologian understand by doing theology in general. In order to answer this question it will be useful to examine what theology means as a discipline within the university. Later, the terms "morality" and "moral" will be examined and brought into consideration of the name of the discipline, "Moral Theology."

1. What is Theology?

The word “theology” means literally a scientific presentation of faith. Insofar as it considers the reality of God as the all-important force in the life and action of human beings, its formal object is God. The combination of the concepts *logos tou theou* (rational teaching of God) is to be understood in the first place as a *genitivus obiectivus*. That God is the formal object of theology means that this discipline views all its themes and objects not from the point of view of humanity but *sub ratione Dei*, insofar as they either concern God Himself – his trinitarian life, his becoming man in Jesus and his action on earth – or are directed toward God as the ultimate foundation and end of all reality. In this sense, all human activity and forms of life can become the subject of theology, insofar as they are directed toward God as their ultimate goal.

However, theology does not talk about God as the source and goal of all created reality in the same way as other sciences focus on their respective material objects: mathematics on numbers and the relations which exist between them, physics on external nature and its regularities, biology on the forms of appearance of life, and literary criticism on different forms of literature. The combination *logos tou theou* must rather be understood as a *genitivus subiectivus*. In this perspective theology appears as a discourse that is made possible through God and is founded in Revelation, that which can be simultaneously discourse coming from God (*genitivus subiectivus*) and discourse about God or in relation to God (*genitivus obiectivus*).

Theology is therefore described as a study of faith or revelation. Its subject, the reality of God, is only accessible through faith and because of the self-manifestation of God in the biblical history of revelation. It is different from religious studies, which observe religious beliefs and expressions of faith from the outside, i.e., from the point of view of an observer prescinding from all claims to the truth; theology, however, is not a discipline without presuppositions. Its object – God and the story of the interaction between God and humanity – is only available to it through faith. It investigates the rational basis of faith insofar as it applies the various methods of its different disciplines to the central verbal and lived expressions of this faith. It does not have its source in the efforts at understanding of the individual theologian but rather serves the common critical self-reflection on faith within the Church. It is therefore at once a science of faith and an expression of the life of the Church. In comparison with other world religions, it is a special characteristic of Christianity that by drawing on the concepts and forms of thought of Greek philosophy it has produced a rational theology, which reflects critically upon and grounds the truth claims of faith.

2. What do we mean by “moral”?

The words “morality” and “moral” have an unattractive connotation in modern languages, as they awaken in the ears of many the suspicion of being deprived of their happiness and joys in life because they encounter morality only in the

form of prohibitions and limits. For this reason many prefer to speak of “ethics” and “ethical” to express the same idea. These words differ only in their origin; the word “morality” comes from Latin (*mos* = custom, practice), whereas the word “ethics” comes from Greek (*ethos* = living space, habit). Both morality and ethos denote lived life and the various forms of human activity in accordance with a given understanding of values. “Ethics,” on the other hand, is the name for the theoretical consideration of moral questions; it is a form of reflection on morality, which moves out of a metaethical level and considers the way questions are posed in morality and the lived ethos of individuals and groups. In terms of this form of differentiation ethics is to ethos and morality what musicology is to music or what English Language Studies are to English Literature.

When ethics as a form of reflection on morality is understood in terms of this analogy with Musicology or English Language Studies, it is important to note an important difference. Moral Theology, as we shall see momentarily, is a reflection of the lived Christian ethos. For this reason it depends upon the moral experience that each person has in life. A musicologist can study pieces of music, even if he or she is unable to play an instrument; a student of Romance or English Languages can seek out literary criteria without being able to write. This is not so in ethics: this science necessarily takes for granted the moral experience of the individual. Since morality is an inner dimension of being human, ethics can legitimately presume that those it addresses have experience of moral questions; every human being knows the perspective of morality, even when he or she acts against it. He or she knows the difference between good and evil and the difference between the merely useful or pleasant on one hand and what one should do on the other. Since we are confronted with questions of what is normatively right in our own living and doing (How do I spend my money? How much time do I dedicate to my family? How do I behave when I get into difficulty?) we are familiar with ethical questions before we begin to reflect upon them. Ethics as an academic discipline builds on these primordial experiences of being human. Moral theology tries to help those who study it to better understand their own moral judgements.

This has a number of consequences: morality does not concern only one among many sectors or areas of reality but is an inner dimension of all reality. It can be defined as a demand that reality makes on the human person in all spheres. To speak of moral life is in this sense synonymous with expressions such as “specifically human life” or “rational form of existence,” for human life involves the task of a free and responsible way of living. Moral science considers the human being, as Thomas Aquinas explains in the prologue to the *Prima secundae*, as the free source of his activity and the author of his life story. In the terminology of modern ethics this means that the human being is a moral subject who shapes his own individual and social existence. Morality is thus concerned not only with the personal life of the individual but also with the activities of social groups and institutions. The subdivision of moral science into ethics of particular areas (bioethics, ethics of relationships, business ethics, peace ethics etc.) allows the differentiation according to sectors of life (economics, social life, politics, partnership and mar-

riage etc). *Materialiter*, then, it is possible to distinguish between different fields of moral discernment, according to which each area is named; *formaliter*, however, the term morality indicates the same thing in every area of life, if this is to be understood as a duty, the difference between good and evil, as the normatively significant or as the axiologically significant.

3. What do we mean by “Moral Theology”?

With this third question we come closer to *what* we do when we do moral theology. What does “Moral Theology” mean? Different answers to this question are possible. When “moral” is understood as an adjective that qualifies “Theology,” two possibilities emerge. First, the adjective indicates a particular part of theology, specifying its content, as was the case in the traditional understanding of moral theology, which in turn is then understood as a sister of dogmatic theology within systematic theology, which is thus divided into *theologia dogmatica*, *theologia fundamentalis* and *theologia moralis*. Second, the adjective “moral” can be understood as a dimension of the whole of theology in all its sub-disciplines. Understood in this way, the question arises as to the premises that should guide reflection on the Christian message under the cultural conditions of modernity. The agenda of ethical theology, as it has been taken up in Protestant theology since the 19th century, presumes that Christianity can only assert itself in modern society when it can demonstrate the usefulness of its ethics. The question of the relationship between ethics and dogmatic theology within Christian theology is not, then, simply a matter of the relationship of one discipline or tract to another. The main question is, given the cultural circumstances of modernity, how can the claim of Christianity be expressed in a better, more appropriate and more realistic manner?

3.1 Moral theology as the theory of how to conduct a good human life in the light of the demands of the Gospel

In my opinion moral theology should not accept such a reduction of Christianity to its ethical significance. On the basis of their own ethos, the Church and individual Christians share in the responsibility for the state and for society. However, the Church is not an enterprise aimed at supplying moral resources to a society that is threatened by a progressive erosion of its consensus on values. When religion is valued only because of its usefulness for morality and for what it can offer in terms of promoting the values of a society, we lose sight of what Christianity is all about. The primary message of Christianity is not that of ethical demands but rather the proclamation of salvation, the revelation of the love of God, the acceptance of forgiveness, redemption and the salvation of humanity. At the same time the idea of an ethics-free way to salvation, which bypasses morality, such as has marked the gnostic understandings of redemption from Antiquity through to our own times, does not do justice to the self-understanding of Chri-

stianity. This demands rather a unity of faith and action, theory and practice, doctrine and life. Hence, faith and morality are of course to be distinguished from one another but should in no way be separated.

It follows that moral theology must be alert to both of these dangers. It must neither reduce the role of Christianity to an ethical theology and its moral significance nor should it give into the temptation to rob faith of its normative demands regarding the chosen way of life, such that it would serve merely to meet the spiritual needs of individuals by overcoming their existential crises. Moral theology, as I understand it, should offer a reasonable self-explanation of faith and thus follow the programme *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding) in terms of the task of leading a good life. Faith that questions its own reasonableness must also become aware of its own ethical implications. This is true of theology in general, including biblical exegesis, liturgy, canon law and dogmatics. The specific task of moral theology within the theological canon is to demonstrate the consequences of faith for the way individuals lead their lives and for the solution of civil conflicts (in areas such as bioethics, social ethics, business ethics, peace ethics etc.). Hence, a good technical definition of moral theology is: the theory of conducting a good life according to the demands of the Gospel and within the horizon of the Christian faith and its view of the world and of human life. Moral theology must therefore take into account the results of research in other theological disciplines, the forms of argumentation used in moral philosophy and the knowledge of the human sciences.

3.2 The relationship between moral theology and philosophical ethics

The relationship of moral theology to philosophical ethics is, in my view, parallel and critical. When moral theology explains the rational basis of the faith with a view to the way of life of Christians it is necessarily dependent on philosophical ethics. This discipline provides theology with the forms of articulation and reflection it needs in order to identify and ground the ethical implications of faith. Given the plurality of philosophical theories in ethics we need to make an important distinction: not every moral philosophical approach corresponds to the demands which moral theology, because of its own self-understanding, makes on the explanatory capacities of different models of ethical explanation. If faith is a reasoned obedience to the Word of God, then a philosophical ethical theory that aspires to help faith to an inner understanding of its moral implications must be able to rationally ground ethical principles and moral norms. Moreover, its anthropological assumptions must correspond to the biblical view of humanity, which emphasizes that the human being is made in the image of God and is a unity of body and soul.

In light of these expectations it is possible to identify some points of convergence between indispensable theological *desiderata* and certain moral philosophical approaches. A cognitive moral theory, which stresses moral realism, for instance, corresponds well to the rational character of the Christian faith and its aspiration to propose a view of the world and of life that embraces all dimensions of

reality. A eudaemonistic ethics corresponds to the message of salvation within Christianity, insofar as it is concerned with the ultimate possibilities of human existence and the perfection of the human being. An ethics of human dignity and human rights based on this dignity corresponds to the biblical conviction that the human being is made in the image of God as well as to the biblical conception of justice. According to the prophets of Israel, justice demands not only formal equality between equals, but also decisive solidarity in favour of the weak and defenceless, of the kind that shaped the option for the poor within liberation theology. Finally, a virtue ethics, which is concerned with the affective development of personal life, is better able to express the unity of body and soul than a merely rational ethics.

A similar convergence seems at first sight to exist between utilitarian ethics and the biblical command of love. It is no accident that the classical theorists of utilitarianism, who in religious terms adhered to a form of enlightened Deism, made appeal to the command of Jesus to place the well-being of one's neighbour at the centre. Examined more closely, however, serious differences emerge: Utilitarianism challenges us in all our activities to improve the overall state of the world by taking the greatest happiness of the greatest number as the measure of our action. The idea of maximizing utility can be used to justify placing greater burdens on some rather than on others or of reducing the moral rights of some if this has the effect of improving the overall balance of happiness. The ethics of Jesus, on the other hand, teaches us that we must meet each human being with kindness, respect and love and insofar as we are able do good to him or her.

Comparing the various theories proposed in philosophical ethics in terms of their reception by theology one concludes that the primary position of Aristotelian-Thomistic ethics is justified, despite its historical conditioning, because it, more than other theories, meets the requirement of moral theology on philosophical ethics mentioned above. This clearly does not exclude the possibility that moral theological theories could be developed on other philosophical bases. A historical example of this is the attempt by Enlightenment theology to construct a Catholic moral theology on the basis of the Kantian ethical system. In our own time some moral theologians find the discourse ethics of Jürgen Habermas or the theory of justice of John Rawls particularly useful for understanding the Christian ethos. In any case, the reception of contemporary philosophies should be accompanied by both assimilation and contradiction in the same way Thomas took up Aristotelian ethics into *sacra doctrina*.

In this context, moral theology is faced with a particular difficulty regarding contemporary philosophy: there is not one philosophy today that is generally accepted as a medium for understanding. Thomas could reach back to Aristotle; the theologians of the 18th and 19th centuries found a natural interlocutor in Idealism; in the 20th century transcendental philosophy, existential philosophy and fundamental ontology (Heidegger) were able to play such a role for the last time. After the collapse of metaphysics there is no philosophical school of thought which of its own account presents itself to theology as an interlocutor. In the area of

moral philosophy none of the contemporary approaches has the kind of breadth that moral theology expects in order to reflect upon the universal significance of biblical revelation for ethics. Both Habermas' discourse ethics and Rawls' understanding of justice as fairness limit themselves explicitly to moral questions of justice in the narrower sense, considering problems such as individual ways of life in partnership, marriage and family or the attitude to mortality and the passing nature of life as evaluative issues in a style of life. Moral theories of this kind do not provide answers to questions about leading a good life. Such issues are no longer considered genuine moral questions but are filed under "comprehensive doctrine" and "strong evaluations" over which no rational understanding is possible or desirable in a pluralistic society.

A promising way out of this dilemma is in my view a rereading of Thomistic Ethics within the hermeneutical horizon of today's philosophical questions. It is a sign of historical significance of Thomistic ethics that it can be taken up in other historical periods. However, this does not mean we have no need of contemporary ethics because we already have in Thomas better answers to all our questions. It is rather the case that problems such as the foundation of norms, virtue ethics and the universal validity of moral principles as they are discussed today can sharpen the lens through which we read Thomas and interpret him within the horizon of our questions.

3.3 The role of Scripture and Tradition in Moral Theology

If one takes up a textbook of the neoscholastic manual tradition – for example, the work of Doctor Joseph Kachnik, which Magris comes upon in an antiques shop – one will not find much biblical inspiration in it. Scriptural references are rare, normally serving simply to support a natural law argument and to complete it with quotations from the teachings of Jesus or from the Apostle Paul. The witness of the Scriptures plays an ornamental role rather than a foundational or justificatory role. Occasionally the manuals recur to individual citations, using them as *dicta probantia* in order to guarantee that given theological positions are in line with the Scriptures. Moral theology of this period treats the Scriptures as a quarry from which it occasionally takes stones in order to build them into its own theoretical structures as an additional ornament. Even the central Scriptural message of the discipleship of Jesus is hardly mentioned. If mentioned at all, it is only an annex to fundamental moral theology, which handles the spiritual foundations of being Christian. In contrast, the Second Vatican Council demands the renewal of moral theology in the spirit of the Scriptures.

It is not easy, in one's moral theological work, to bring the two methodological demands of the Council on the renewal of moral theology into harmony. The discipline should be both "nourished" by the teaching of the Scriptures and be scientifically sound. Achieving this involves more than gathering and ordering according to their various perspectives the different biblical texts on law, warnings, prophetic denunciations, proverbs and – in the New Testament – the parables of Jesus, the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount, the lists of virtues and vices

in Paul's epistles. Even if it were possible with the help of the various exegetical methods to overcome the difficulties that arise in historical, form-critical and history of tradition perspectives, the key problem of biblical ethics remains unsolved: the description of historical forms of life at the time of composition of the biblical texts and the reconstruction of specific sayings of Jesus do not say anything about their normativity. As an historical science, exegesis can trace the exact meaning of particular admonitions, but this does not constitute an explanation of why these demands apply to the existence of contemporary Christians.

Merely descriptive biblical ethics would contradict not only the demands of science-based ethics, the second demand of the Council, but also the character of the Scriptural texts themselves. The primary intention of these is not to describe human character or found moral norms but to preach the saving message of the Gospel. The Bible is neither a primitive book about Nature nor an elementary manual of moral theology, but the announcement of salvation, in which the Word of God comes to humanity. The scope of an ethical exegesis of Scripture cannot therefore simply lie in the historical understanding of a given text, even if this is essential in order to understand its moral significance. The purpose of exegesis must rather be to open up the revealed message, a message that is in turn aimed at bringing about a new self-understanding in those who hear the Word of God. Ethical scriptural exegesis is therefore a mutual interaction in which the interpreter studies the biblical text in order to allow his or her own existence to be interpreted in light of the demands of the text. Only in this way can moral theology effectively become a theory of the right conduct of human life according to the demands of the Gospel.

Biblical exegesis and theological ethics approach the Scriptural text from quite different points of view. Whereas exegesis asks what the biblical statements mean in their original context and in the context of the whole of the Scriptures, theological ethics enquires into the relevance of these statements for the moral challenges of today. It tries to ensure that its reflections are in conformity with the revelation of the love of God in the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth in order to perceive the relevance of the ethical perspectives present in the Scripture to current problems. Such a creative application to changed circumstances of another epoch is made necessary in any case because the Scriptures do not say anything about many of the problematical areas of life today: biotechnology, the globalization of the economy, the subversion of the media, the rapid increase in world population, the changes in the labour market, the dissolution of traditional family structures and the development of new military weapons. The hermeneutical process of creatively applying Scriptural texts, which moral theology must undertake if it is to be inspired by the Scriptures, can be described as "analogical imagination," to quote a term used by my Roman teacher Klaus Demmer.

Unfortunately the connection between biblical inspiration and scientific presentation called for by the Council remains something of a *desideratum*, which very few moral theological publications manage to achieve. There are good presentations of biblical ethics and good moral theological discussions of problems

such as the foundation of norms, the analysis of freedom, epistemological foundations and virtue ethics, which are carried out at the same level as contemporary philosophical ethics. But it is seldom that these two fields are really combined so as to permeate each other. The diastasis between the Bible and morality cannot really be overcome as long as moral theological reflection frames its questions primarily in terms of philosophical ethics and only secondarily tries to establish the link with the Scriptures. The meaning of the witness of the Scriptures for leading a Christian life cannot be expressed by arbitrarily selecting passages from some texts of the biblical ethos (the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, the double command to love God and neighbour) but must rather be based on a solid exegesis.

Whoever wants to do moral theology today cannot limit his or her attention to the writings of psychologists, sociologists and cultural anthropologists as well as moral philosophers, but must be familiar with the exegetical literature on the Bible of Israel and of the Church. Even if I have not found for myself a satisfactory solution to the problem of how exegetical knowledge can enrich moral reflection, I do try to let such writings inspire me. This is made easier when biblical exegesis is not limited to philological analysis or identifying the original historical sense of the text (necessary as these are for a correct understanding of the Bible), but rather attempts to bring out the testimony of the Scriptures within the horizon of the questions of today's readers. Exegetes thus take a step towards the work of the moral theologian. It is worth making explicit mention of the document of the Papal Biblical Commission published in May 2008, which is the fruit of intense collaboration between exegetes and moral theologians. It is marked by its attempt to unfold the message of the Scriptures within the perspective of contemporary moral questions. The document thus achieves a systematic presentation of the Christian ethos, which brings out its particularity.

It is important to be aware of the tradition of the Church and the history of one's own discipline, because a radical discontinuity in Christian ethics between various epochs would make the demands of Christianity implausible. Knowledge of history and a comparison of the answers of today with those of other generations are therefore essential. A precise historical investigation of our discipline also serves to avoid the erroneous impression that the Church teachings on given moral questions (in sexual and medical ethics for instance) are absolutely unchanging. However, attending to history in this way does not substitute for the systematic task we must undertake given the questions of our time. It would be regrettable if the pressure of modern questions pushed the history of the discipline to the margins. It is therefore to be hoped that individual scholars produce more historical studies. The history of Catholic Moral Theology should not be seen as merely the history of the literature but should embrace all modern methods of research (the history of mentalities, of societies). It would then have the task of showing how Christians in former times understood the ethical implications of faith and, in terms of the model of challenge and response, how they responded to the challenge of their culture. Key questions in this respect might be: What

forms of life did the Christian faith take on at this time? What compromises did the Church make with the world of the time? How did the Gospel shape culture? What changes did the message of the Gospel bring about in the civil consciousness of the epoch (I am thinking of slavery, interest on loans, the development of law and the idea of the just war etc.)?

4. The Three Pillars of Moral Theology

The special meaning of our work as moral theologians emerges if we think about the people for whom we practice this discipline. As professors we are first and foremost there for our students. Our role is to pass on to them the knowledge and the intellectual skills necessary for their future work as priests, lay theologians and teachers of religion. This is not only a matter of acquiring knowledge; it is most of all about developing their capacity to judge, that is to say, their ability to respond to new ethical challenges in the light of ethical principles and values. A certain logical order exists between these different goals of learning: it is most important to develop one's own capacity to judge. This presumes knowledge of the classical forms of ethical argumentation. Where there is a doubt, questions of fundamental moral theology are more important than a comprehensive knowledge of the current problems of applied ethics. These kinds of questions change quickly: what is important in bioethics today can be out of date tomorrow. For this reason it is top priority to enable the students to develop their own capacity of judgement, which they will then be able to apply independently to the questions of the future.

Most of my work as a moral theologian therefore consists of lectures, weekly seminars and colloquia with my doctoral and postdoctoral students. In terms of my personal priorities, the weekly lecture ranks at the top of the list, for it is the high point of my academic week. I have never been able to understand the attitude of some senior colleagues who view teaching as an unfortunate interruption of their research work at their desks. The option of becoming a research professor, which some German universities now make along the lines of the Anglo-Saxon system, does not attract me at all. In my academic work I rather try to see the tasks of research and teaching as equally important. The idea of the unity of research and teaching, which in the German university system goes back to Wilhelm von Humbolt (1767-1835), goes against the caricature of the German professor who hardly leaves his study the whole day, writing works full of quotations and overloaded with footnotes for a narrow public of specialists. Research and teaching, in my understanding of things, should not only be equally important in moral theological work but also be in a mutual interaction that enriches both. The results of one's research and of discussion with colleagues can be brought into lectures and so allow the students to keep up to date with the latest developments in the discipline. On the other hand, one's own teaching tasks can have an effect on long-term research or writing projects (most of my books derive from studies which I undertook in the first place during the preparation of lectures).

In my lectures I try to follow the suggestions of the Roman philosopher Cicero, who held that a public speech – and an academic lecture belongs to this rhetorical category – must fulfill three functions: it should instruct (*docere*), move (*moveri*) and delight (*delectari*). This means that a lecture should of course have content and transmit knowledge; the students should be introduced to the content of the discipline in an accessible manner with the help of examples. As a professor I should not limit myself to explaining different theories and discussing their advantages and disadvantages from a distance. Rather, I wish to take a position, defend a point of view and through my testimony strengthen the students in the formation of their own opinions. The word “professor” after all has its origin in the Latin word *pro-fiteri* (= publicly acknowledge, explain). To be a professor therefore means not just to exercise a profession but also to take an intellectual stance. Whoever always discusses only arguments, presents new theories and explains what others think, all in the name of scientific objectivity, misunderstands the latter and deprives the students of something vital. They have of course the right to learn other opinions alongside that of their professor, but this presumes that an academic teacher stands by his own scientific convictions and does not hide behind the opinions of others. He should take a position, show his colours and, while showing due respect for those who think differently, take a clear stance in scientific discussions.

The students have the right to be educated through the way their professor takes a scientific position, reasons it and defends it against critics. The underlying academic attitude that emerges from all this shapes the image the students form of an academic teacher, often more so than the specific content of his lectures. These attitudes should ultimately make apparent to the students the joy I experience in doing moral theology. In order to achieve this I try to make the presentation of the material to be learned more interesting by recounting personal experiences or encounters that I have had which have left a particular impression on me. This should have the effect of showing that moral theology is not a sterile academic activity but is rooted in biography. Sometimes I manage to make the students laugh by telling a joke that has to do with the theme of the lecture. Moral theology is not only a serious matter; it can also be fun at times.

In addition to my teaching activities at the university and my research work there is a third pillar to moral theology that has become increasingly important in the last few decades: taking part in the public discourse and moral controversies of society. Whoever does moral theology in the name of the Church finds himself exposed in a particular way when he makes public appearance in which he has to represent Christianity and its message in different settings. Moral theologians, whether they be priests or lay people, should incarnate the figure of the Catholic intellectual by taking part in cultural debates and having a recognizable voice within them. They need to possess the essential characteristics needed to do moral theology today; in addition to those required for scientific work (e.g., objectivity, clarity of method, capacity to be self-critical) they must have independence, civil courage and a highly developed capacity for reflection that does not

simply conform to the pressures of a given cultural context. Whoever takes part in debates on morally controversial questions such as abortion and euthanasia, on embryo research and biotechnology or on the responsibility of banks and managers, needs to have the courage of his convictions.

Participation in public debates can happen at different levels; it can take the form of lectures, newspaper interviews, and participation in podium discussions, talk shows or in events organized by ecclesiastical academies. The challenge to scientists and university researchers not to withdraw into the ivory tower but rather to present themselves in public applies to all theological disciplines and particularly to moral theology because of its immediate thematic vicinity to cultural, moral and political discussions. Resisting the common temptation within the Church to withdraw into an intellectual ghetto, theologians who represent the Church in public discussions do it a real service, even though some faithful and Church officials sometimes disapprove of their public appearances.

Ethics commissions, media debates and numerous public lectures are an important part of our work as moral theologians. The relative weight given to the three pillars of research, teaching and participation in public debate must be properly balanced. Only someone who is solidly rooted in his own discipline and is in touch with the issues through personal study of the sources and pursuit of his own research interests can in the long run defend an independent position. Alfons Auer, my teacher at Tübingen, who in my view played the public role of the moral theologian in a competent, persuasive and truly exemplary fashion, when I was studying Thomas Aquinas for my doctorate, gave me this advice: "Enjoy this time when you can research freely; later you will not find the time!" At the time I was annoyed at his friendly suggestion to enjoy the opportunity to do research, because I thought he, like my Bishop, expected speedy progress and an early completion of my work. In the meantime I have come to understand better what he meant. Like many other professions, moral theology requires not only competence in the material but also the ability to coordinate different tasks and expectations in such a way that they do not interfere with each other but are genuinely complementary. Activities that hinder our long-term scientific work, such as lectures, participation in meetings and the production of articles, are not always priorities. The same principle applies here as in other areas of life: in the midst of all the pressing daily activities that occupy a moral theologian (reading articles, writing reviews and evaluations, planning lectures etc.) there is a need for free space and creative pauses in order to stimulate fresh thinking.

5. The Ethos of Moral Theology

Members of some professions have a marked sense of responsibility that finds expression in the recognition of a certain professional ethical code through which the members commit themselves to respect defined professional safety practices. Officials and judges are thus obliged to avoid corruption; doctors

and ministers of religion are obliged to confidentiality, police and fire service officers to giving help in emergency situations (even to the point of risking their lives) and soldiers are obliged to respect international law even in battle. Is there a similar kind of common ethos for Moral Theology, i.e., a certain code of honour that would make it possible to judge whether someone doing moral theology is doing it in a correct manner?

In the 19th century, the professors at the different Catholic faculties at Tübingen (especially Dogmatics and Moral Theology, Catechetics and Symbolism, Apologetics and Exegesis) attempted to give their discipline a common, formal approach, despite the different areas of study. They chose three key terms to guide their theological work in the different faculties, which seemed to remain indispensable for anyone who wanted to do moral theology and which were intended to express programmatically one's expectations of one's own theological work; they were: scientific quality, adherence to the Church and openness to contemporary culture. Each individual may give different accents to the way he does moral theology, according to his biography and gifts. Given the conflicting demands within the ethos of this discipline, it is unrealistic to expect that one would manage to integrate them in a fully tension-free, harmonious unity. At the same time, whoever seriously wishes to do moral theology at a university, in the Church or when confronted with the problems of contemporary culture cannot dispense with the three ideals.

5.1 The Ethos of Scientific Quality

First, it should be obvious that whoever works in the field of moral theology would apply the intellectual standards that determine the specific ethos of this science; this ethos comprises a wide range of qualities, such as discipline and care in the interpretation of texts, scepticism toward easy solutions, fairness in presenting the positions of others, avoiding polemics and defamation of persons (neither of these has any place in a scientific debate regarding a given problem), concentration on the issue, recognition of the achievement of others (e.g. by adequate citation), recognising other approaches, openness toward other styles of thought, readiness to cooperate, willingness to share the fruits of one's research with others. These basic rules of scientific conduct are as important in theology as in other disciplines; whoever acts against these basic rules excludes himself from the house of science.

These standards apply as well when the moral theologian takes part in public debates (on questions of life, family- and social politics, offering asylum, protecting minorities, religious freedom, international justice, protection of human rights etc.), which are necessarily "apologetic" in both senses of this term: whoever takes part in such moral theological discussions wants both to offer a rational defence of his own position and to put other positions into question. In so doing he should be guided by a fundamental attitude of intellectual openness, which does not see secular philosophers or scientists as mere *adversarii* to be fought against but respects them, also in the public forum, as interlocutors with whom one wants

to engage in discussion on a given topic. As theologians we do well to retain this openness and nobility of mind even when others involved in a discussion do not show openness to a serious scientific exchange but rather engage in whipping up public opinion or increasing anti-Church sentiment in the media.

5.2 The Ethos of Adherence to the Church

Second, our work as moral theologians should be marked by what we call “adherence to the Church.” The author of the manual mentioned earlier seemed to be of considerable personal modesty to the modern author who discovered the work by chance in an antiques shop. The tract is written, as Magris notes in his diary, “without pretence at originality, with the single purpose of presenting the teaching of the Church.” Such an approach is incompatible with the modern view of science, particularly of the human sciences, that gives considerable weight to the identity of an individual author, to his characteristic ways of thinking, to the style of his writing and to the authenticity of his lived witness. At the same time, vanity, desire for fame and the need to be at the centre of public attention are considered morally questionable defects in the field of secular science since they do damage to the idea of unprejudiced, objective research.

This is all the more true of moral theology, whose scientific character is constituted in important ways by its relationship to biblical revelation and thus also by its insertion in the Church. In positive terms, this means anyone who works as a public teacher of the faith in a theological office should have in his personal ethos a clear awareness that his personal capacities and gifts are made available to the community, to which others also contribute. I do not consider this a limitation of my scientific possibilities but a reassuring guarantee that I am not a loner struggling for a lost cause. The large number of dissertations and publications of younger theologians in the field of ethics and moral theology strengthens me in my conviction that I am supported in my moral theological work by similar efforts on the part of others.

In my opinion, the necessary loyalty toward the Church should not be seen primarily as a disadvantage that limits the space available for my moral theological work. Rather, my own work finds a solid foundation in relation to the common faith of the Church, on the basis of which I can confront secular society and its problems.

At the same time I see my task as a public teacher of theology as one given to me by the Church, but which I have to pursue on my own responsibility, which is why I deliberately speak of the teaching office that is given to me. Whoever takes on a role in moral theology at the university, in the Church or in modern society, takes on a public role, which he certainly exercises in the name of the Church (not only in the name of the Magisterium but also in the name of the whole community of believers), but which requires genuine scientific competence and responsibility. This differentiation, which insists on the distinctive role and independence of theology from the teaching authority of the Church, is not adequately trea-

ted in magisterial statements such as the instruction of the Roman Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the “Mission of the theologian within the Church” of 1990, which describes the activities and reasons for the existence of theology in general and of moral theology in particular.

According to the delegation model envisaged here the task of theology is limited to seeking evidence in the sources of faith (the Scriptures, Tradition, magisterial teaching) for the truths of faith as they are laid out by the Magisterium of the Pope and bishops. None of the great theologians of the last decades who were later made bishops and cardinals – Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, Alois Grillmeier, Walter Kasper or Avery Dulles – understood their task as theologians in this minimalist fashion. Rather, they saw in their appointments as bishops a confirmation of the highly independent way in which they had earlier worked as public teachers of theology and interpreters of the faith and its truth. However welcome the belated recognition of what these theologians had done in the intellectual service to the Church may be, it does not alter the fact that many of them had difficulties with the Magisterium of the Church and were hindered in their work by prohibitions of teaching and writing, censure from within the Orders and similar vexations.

Looking back on the 19th century from today’s perspective, it is also clear that the theologians who best served the Church and the future of its faith were in their time often met with disapproval on account of their freedom of spirit and intellectual openness by those who held themselves to be orthodox. Theologians and Christian philosophers such as Antonio Rosmini, John Henry Newman, Friedrich von Hügel and Johann Baptist Hirscher were pioneers in thinking about the faith, for they showed the Church the way forward through the reforms that they recommended. However, those who led the Church into a spiritual ghetto, which later turned out to be a dead-end, did the Church real damage. It would of course be unreasonable to compare ourselves with the great theological figures of the past who have found general approval as the pioneers of modern theology even on the part of the Magisterium of the Church. Nevertheless, we should emulate the fundamental intellectual attitude to the theological task that they adopted out of loyalty to the Church. Not only *may* we do this, as if we were daring to do something beyond our role, but within the limits of our given circumstances we *must* follow their example if we wish to fulfill the office the Church has assigned to us.

I am encouraged in this stance by the great speech of Pope John Paul II in his address to scientists in Köln on the occasion of his first visit to Germany, where he explained that science gets its legitimacy from the fact that it is committed to the search for truth, which it can only realize if it is spared external interference in its freedom and independence. Concretely, the Pope speaks of a trio that should guide scientific work, namely personal understanding, freedom and truth. He then speaks of the role of theology among the sciences.

A view that emphasizes the genuine role of theological research can make appeal to the solution used in the Middle Ages to reflect the difference and inde-

pendence of theology relative to the Magisterium of the Church. Thomas Aquinas distinguished a double cathedra in the Church, namely the *cathedra pontificalis* in the case of the Magisterium of the bishops and the Pope and the *cathedra magistralis* in the case of the Magisterium of theologians. The two are not on the same level because the bishops, with the Pope at their head, are responsible for the public care of the Church, *cura publica ecclesiae*; they effect their pastoral service in the Church not only through the exercise of their leadership authority but also through the preaching of the truths of faith. Nonetheless, the *cathedra magistralis* of theology has its own independent teaching role along that of the Pope and the bishops, which is based on the fact that it, on the basis of the Scriptures and the articles of faith, is in the service of the inner reasonableness of this faith and expounds the *intellectus fidei* in scientific form.

The relationship between independence and submission that binds the theological magisterium and the Magisterium of the bishops is carefully balanced here. The *cathedra magistralis* of the theologians is an independent public office within the Church; it is however subordinate to the *cura pastoralis*, the preaching ministry of the Church, which is entrusted primarily to the bishops and mostly to the Pope. This subjection to the preaching ministry of the Church does not contradict the scientific independence of theology, since the scientific study of the faith of the Church and the individual articles of faith is presupposed. The *licentia docendi*, the license to teach, was at that time granted by the *doctores* of theology, who were familiar with the finer points of the discipline.

Given the current state of the Church, which in many countries is marked by an increasing alienation between the Magisterium and the faithful, a moral theologian is often caught between contrasting expectations that are not easily harmonised. The Magisterium demands of moral theologians a particular loyalty, the test of which is defending the more controversial teachings publicly in the Church and in society. Whenever I am able to meet this expectation out of my personal conviction, I am quite willing as a moral theologian to assume a clear Church profile in public debate, in cases such as biopolitics, in questions concerning the duty to defend human embryos, the moral evaluation of stem-cell research or a decisive rejection of abortion, euthanasia and assisted suicide. However, when the Magisterium seeks the obedience of moral theologians in questions that are debated within the Church, things become more complicated, for moral theology finds itself between two expectations of loyalty, since it must also articulate the critical questions and the emerging difficulties in the understanding and in the life experiences of the dissenting faithful, some of whom are fully convinced of the truths of faith and can say the Credo of the Church out of personal conviction, but who have insurmountable doubts on some specific elements of teaching.

Since the distance between many believers and the Magisterium of the Church often concerns problems of one's personal life, moral theology cannot ignore these critical questions. Intellectual honesty requires, also within the Church, that one is not satisfied with insufficient answers and does not suppress unresolved problems. Moral theology can therefore do service to the community of the fai-

thful by taking a position against silence on unresolved problems. Loyalty toward the Magisterium is not necessarily contradicted by probing the reasons why broad circles of the people of God have not accepted its teachings that touch upon the way of life of the faithful, such as the issues of artificial contraception, the use of condoms by people infected with HIV or the admission to the sacraments of the remarried divorcés. The Magisterium does not do itself any favour by interpreting the doubts of conscience on the part of the faithful or the witness of life experiences that go against its indications as signs of disobedience. Unresolved questions do not disappear just because the Magisterium continually ignores them or invokes a past decision on its part.

When one recalls unpleasant questions that have been on the agenda within the Church for a long time, one should of course resist the temptation to take advantage of the media to come out in a strong profile at the expense of the Church and her Magisterium. (During my time as a student I learned from some theologians who were active in the media how I would not wish to behave in public debate if I should find myself as a moral theologian in such a situation). Freethinking criticism of the Church is a delicate and also a necessary task. Statements not carefully thought out can quickly put one in danger of being misrepresented by the media. One should therefore seek to avoid isolating oneself within the Church in order to be celebrated in the media as a professional Church critic, a role which some adopt all too fondly. One has to be especially careful about the tone in the case of critical public statements. It should be clear to all that one is speaking out of concern for the Church because one feels the duty to do so in a given circumstance. This is not meant to be an appeal for timidity or excessive caution, but as a rule I can give myself when I take a position on an issue that is controversial within the Church as part of my vocation to the theological magisterium.

5.3 The ethos of a critical stance on contemporary culture

Third, the ethos of moral theology should be marked by a critical stance on contemporary culture. This calls for openness to the worries, problems and difficulties of the present time, a readiness to face the challenges and to share the weight of responsibility for society and for the people who live in it. The Second Vatican Council describes this as a priority duty of the Church and of the faithful: “to scrutinize the signs of the time and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel.” The Council infers a similar task from the dignity of conscience. Understood in this way, critical involvement in contemporary culture is a consequence of the mission of the Church to the world. Sent to all human beings to preach the Gospel, the Church is not called to speak to society from the outside but to give expression to the Word of salvation so that it can reach the people and shape their lives, enlightening them with the light of the Gospel.

Whoever does moral theology today must be aware that he is in a double relationship of trust. In order to be faithful to his own tradition of faith he must respond to the demands of the Scriptures and the tradition of the Church in such a way as not to ignore the worries and difficulties of people who live today. In order to be

faithful to the concrete people of today whom he must serve, he must share their problems, conflicts and inner contradictions in such a way as not to forget on this account his commitment to the tradition of faith. This double demand of faithfulness helps us to see that the ethos of involvement in contemporary culture does not call for a merely strategic adjustment to the forms of thought and the horizons of plausibility of the present situation. Solidarity with the worries and difficulties of people is rather a demand that is intimately tied to the task of preaching the Gospel and proclaiming the Reign of God. Christian involvement in contemporary culture draws its justification and its particular motivation from the central content of the preaching of Jesus, that is the coming of the Reign of God, which the Church is to serve in its preaching, in the celebration of the sacraments and in her social commitment to the poor. Christianity and involvement in contemporary culture are therefore not unconnected and incompatible; rather, the command to be companions of those to whom the Gospel is preached is tied to the task of preaching.

It is therefore not an option for the Church to not participate in contemporary culture. The Church faces this challenge anew in each era of its history, for the Church can only remain true to its own origins if it attempts to live the Gospel with which it has been entrusted in a given time and not in some distant place beyond history, untouched by the problems of the present. There is no time in which we as Christians can live and can preach the Gospel other than our present time. It is just as misplaced to flee nostalgically into a glorious time in the past as it is to dream of a utopian place in the future, which only serves to hold back the effort to solve current problems. Love of the Church – earlier this was called more modestly *sentire cum ecclesia* – does not mean being in love with one's own dream of the Church, be this of a progressive-utopian or conservative-restorationist kind. Love of the Church always presumes solidarity with the living believers of today aimed at helping them in their efforts to live convincing Christian lives under the conditions of any given time.

When we do moral theology given the social, cultural and political challenges of our time, we offer a convincing witness of the Church and her presence in society. Moreover, moral theology can thus focus on the faithful themselves in order to strengthen their faith and show them that, as a Christian and following the teachings of the Church, one can be on the same intellectual level as society. Believers who are mentally and culturally open often have difficulty taking this path. When I hold lectures in moral theology, take part in debates or write books, I keep particularly these people in mind. I can only be content with my work when I manage to strengthen these people in their conviction that the Christian faith has an answer to the deepest questions of human life that surpasses other sources, most of all the modish intellectual theories of our time. This requires, however, a fundamental attitude of openness toward the thinkers and interpreters of our time, who are not to be seen merely as interlocutors whom one must accept because they are unavoidable. It is rather that we have to learn from them in order to better understand our time. It is often they who help us pose the right questions to our own tradition so that it comes alive again.

6. Conclusion: why do I do moral theology?

Many think that in the present situation of the Church our discipline finds itself self faced with a particularly onerous task in that we risk being crushed between the pressure from within the Church on the one hand and that of the contrary currents of contemporary culture on the other. This is not my experience. To work as a moral theologian at the university, in the Church and in society seems to me to be a most worthwhile task, which is cause for gratitude and contentment in spite of some difficulties and disappointments. As a priest I am involved in a wide range of activities, which let me combine science and preaching, personal study and public appearances. The general public is very interested in the themes we are working on in moral theology. It is an activity that brings us into contact with people of all kinds, both within and outside the Church. I see a particular advantage in being a university teacher in that it allows me a great deal of free space and personal independence. The greatest advantage of my work is that it brings me into daily contact with open young people at the university. Given the age structure of most parish communities in Germany this is a rare privilege, which reminds me of Paul's statement "I have planted, Apollo watered, God gave the growth" (1 Cor 3,6). It is not to our credit but to that of many other people – parents, teachers and ministers – that these young people come to the university and decide to study theology, often with an emphasis on moral theology. It is always worthwhile and gratifying to be able to accompany these young people as an academic teacher in an important phase of their professional preparation and their personal journey of faith.