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## SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY IN 19<sup>TH</sup>–20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY HUNGARIAN CATHOLIC PRAYER BOOKS

**Abstract:** This study presents and interprets the church topos formed in the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries according to which the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the church judgement of sexual behaviour arising from it. The prayer books of the period are the primary sources of my analysis. Making use of a previously entirely unexplored Hungarian Catholic source group, the texts of prayers and meditations, as well as the examinations of conscience, the mirror of the soul, related to confession, I look at where the church at that time drew the acceptable boundaries of sexuality and how it argued when defining those boundaries. Church discourse on the topic focused on excessive expectations regarding purity of the body. This was especially evident in the prayer and meditation texts recommended for young girls. A special language built up of metaphors describing purity placed on a pedestal and almost sacralised, and of coded allusions can be observed in the texts. All further virtues were seen to arise from this, and so they were protected almost obsessively from even the thought of sexuality. The main antidotes to the dangers of sensuality were full isolation, suppression and the conscious stifling of emotions. Catholic girls and women had to be continuously on guard to keep the defensive functions operating, and in case of concern to seek the advice of their spiritual counsellor.

**Keywords:** sexuality, bodily purity, Roman Catholic, turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century, prayer

“One thing is beyond doubt. The development of modern Hungary is keeping pace with other countries, we have the same problems: in Hungary too the impoverishment of the middle class and the alarming decline in the number of marriages are cause for concern. The question of women will therefore mobilise society with increasing urgency. We must not allow Christian guidance of the question to slip from our hands.”<sup>1</sup>

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1 VETÉSI 1900. 898.

József Vetési, a renowned Catholic journalist of the period concluded his three-part study on female emancipation in the columns of *Katolikus Szemle* in 1900 with those words. The author of the article drew the attention of the paper's Christian intellectual readers to the need for the church too, to deal with the affairs of women, their role and situation. It must give Christian answers to the questions also affecting women in the bourgeois society that was taking shape, such as education for women, their employment, legal situation and their role in the family. However, in addition to these important questions of public life, the church also needed to adopt a position on such seemingly insignificant matters as women's sexual behaviour and morals. Although for centuries the supreme control authority in this area was in the hands of institutions of the church, new considerations had appeared in thinking on sexuality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The concept of sexuality itself too was a new, artificial construct, it came into use in the vernacular around that time.<sup>2</sup> Its roots reach back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when thinking about matters of sexuality changed fundamentally and a new way of seeing things was emerging, shaped by discourses in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on freedom, individualism and the laws of nature, as well as by rapidly developing medical science.<sup>3</sup> Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century the subject of sexual life was an integral part of human life, in the Early Modern age the state took these questions into account only in respect to marriage and in connection with important socio-economic and criminal matters.<sup>4</sup> It focused principally on women's sexual reproductive role, as it also had material implications. Accordingly, influential figures in public life considered two kinds of sexual behaviour: from within marriage and from outside marriage. Since they saw a problem in children born outside marriage (they had to be brought up by the community), they designated marriage as the only place for carnal relations. All other sexual forms fell outside the acceptable.<sup>5</sup> The increasingly frequent articulation of this thought in public discourse is a clear indication that the new European elite were filled with concern over the sexual reproductive role of women. The leading men of the period feared

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2 In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the meaning of the adjective sexual formed from the noun sex designating the individual's gender began to be extended to procreation. An important role was played in this by the fact that the increasingly rapid pace of development of biology and medical science made it possible to identify connections between anatomical characteristics and behaviour. For example the recognition that plants and animals are also sexual beings, and their gender strongly influences their behaviour. In this way the concept of sex and sexuality acquired a new dimension and in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was gradually expanded and made more precise (for example with the appearance of the concepts of "sexual desire", "sexual function", the "sexual act", etc). Michel Foucault pointed out that in addition to the expansion and greater precision of the concepts, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was also a steady increase in the number of discourses on the subject, at least in the legal and medical aspects. However, the psychological study of sexual behaviour – that is, the more serious examination of sexual roles, capabilities, motivations and performances – was only just beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and only fully developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For more detail, see: SZILÁGYI 2006. 11–13; FOUCAULT 1999. 19–52; FREVERT 1986. 129–130.

3 HULL 1988. 49.

4 HULL 1988. 50–51.

5 HULL 1988. 52.

that women could disrupt and destroy the social order with their behaviour. They therefore considered it necessary to keep sexual life under legal and consistent control and restrictions.<sup>6</sup> They elaborated a moral ideal and behaviour pattern in the interest of the well-being of society that linked morality and sexuality. In this view women were simultaneously full of strength and weak individuals. They were weak and insignificant in the sense that they were given a secondary role, one of obedience. At the same time their role was also important: by pushing them into the private sphere they were imbued with sexual power as they were the ones who gave birth to children, and it was their task to maintain the moral order of the family and society.<sup>7</sup> Under the influence of all these processes sexuality became an important topic of the bourgeois era and this was true not only for secular but also for church discourse.

In this study I would like to connect to the latter topic. My aim is to present and interpret the topos shaped by the church over centuries – that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit<sup>8</sup> – and the church judgement and norms of sexual behaviour arising from it. The primary sources of my analysis are Catholic prayer books published in Hungary in the decades around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century (1865–1935), compiled principally for women and young girls.<sup>9</sup> Making use of the previously entirely unexplored Hungarian Catholic source group, the texts of prayers and meditations, as well as the examinations of conscience, the mirror of the soul, related to confession, I look at where the church at that time drew the acceptable boundaries of sexuality and how it argued when defining those boundaries.

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6 FUCHS – THOMPSON 2005. 24.

7 FUCHS – THOMPSON 2005. 34.

8 The origin of the often-used image can be traced back to the words of Saint Paul in his letter to the Corinthians: “Do you not know that one who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were brought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.” (1 Cor. 6, 16–20.)

9 A multiyear project processing prayer books drew my attention to the source material. For the database of the prayer books processed see: <http://neprajz.bibl.u-szeged.hu/IMA/login.php>. Our main aim in the project was to use the texts of the prayer books, that is religious teachings systematised and passed on by the authors, that is, the clergy, to reveal the dogmatic precepts of the different denominations and through these to attempt to approach the religious culture and spirituality of a given age. The texts of the books also allow us to bring considerations of social history to their analysis, as their prayers were not entirely individualised creations but rather attempted to meet complex demands. They have a normative character, they serve as a guide to readers, explaining their obligations and striving to be useful in a wide variety of situations and for as many people as possible. In short, they were intended to meet a form of mass demand. It is therefore my hypothesis that their texts can effectively contribute to creating real or expected female behaviour models and social roles. For more details on prayer books as sources for women’s history, see: BRANDT 2004. 16–21; BRANDT 2005. 96–127; KRATZ-RITTER 1995; SAURER 1990a 37–59; SAURER 1991. 335–358.

## About the sources

While up to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there are hardly any known Catholic prayer books aimed specifically at women in the range offered in Hungary, from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a striking increase in the number of prayer books intended for women, young girls and educational institutions for girls. The picture emerging from my investigations to date is that most of these books were compiled for urban female educational institutions, church schools and in general for literate and more educated women in towns and cities.<sup>10</sup> This circumstance determined not only the audience targeted by the authors but also the possible reading public for the books. It is known that even after the Compromise of 1867, educational affairs remained largely in church hands. In its scale, results and influence the comprehensive system of Catholic schools played the most important role in the country in the creation of culture and transmission of knowledge. This was especially so considering that it extended to all levels, from kindergarten to higher education.<sup>11</sup> This provided an excellent and broad field for control, from childhood catechism or early indoctrination, despite the fact that the church basically did not approve of education for girls.<sup>12</sup> Its basic position was that women, by their nature, were intended primarily for the role of motherhood, they must fulfil their vocation primarily “in the sanctuary of the household altar”. In addition the urban environment marked by the greatest degree of licentiousness and the novelties of the bourgeois world (easier access to the cinema, theatre, press, novels) in itself also justified the strengthening of the church’s position. The prayer books that at the time fell into the category of mass literature products, proved to be a good means to attain these goals. Beside them sermons from the pulpit continued to have an influence in shaping opinion and transmitting values.

In addition to the target audience, the authors of these books are also worthy of attention. With two exceptions they were members of the clergy or renowned Catholic male intellectuals: writers, poets, orators or less famous secular priests, teachers in church schools, or members of the major monastic orders.<sup>13</sup> Thus, when we take their prayer and meditation texts as the subject of analysis, we can read about the image they held of women. It is not a descriptive image, but a normative and prescriptive one. Principally because in most cases the norms they set for women not only differed from the norms held up for men, but probably also from the realities of women’s lives.

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10 Edith Saurer reaches the same conclusion from her study of Austrian prayer books of the period. SAURER 1991. 351.

11 GERGELY 1999. 246.

12 KÁDÁR 2014. 32.

13 We know of only two women authors of prayer books in Hungary: Mária Blaskó (1891–1956) and Irma Reiner (1878–?). Mária Blaskó was active as a writer and teacher, one of the leading figures in the Veneration of the Sacred Heart children’s movement (Heart Brigade) in Hungary. Irma Reiner became known as a translator and writer of religious works. See: MKL I. 2003. 870; MKL XI. 2006. 542.

## Focus on the virtue of purity

A rather long list could be drawn up of the virtues regarded by authors of prayer books of the period as basic characteristics of the ideal Christian woman: she was modest, humble, warm-hearted, strong-spirited, devout, understanding, gracious, wise, loyal, merciful, God-fearing, working for the happiness of others, ready to make sacrifices, noble-spirited, quiet, soft-spoken, not given to gossip, cheerful, a preserver of taste, dedicated, obedient, pure of heart and soul, moderate (in dance, dress, entertainment, sensuality, thinking), innocent, unspoiled, disciplined in her morality, self-denying, above reproach, of lily-like purity, able to suppress her sensuality, did not fornicate, was not lascivious; diligent, homely, frugal, aware of her responsibilities, not wasteful, did not overdress. It can be seen from this long list that could be a catalogue of virtues that together with many qualities of general validity and conducive to piety, a striking number were directed at women's morality involving first and foremost bodily purity and innocence. A great many of the prayers unequivocally show that, in addition to overcoming the dangers arising from the bourgeois world, young girls and the mothers bringing them up should pray above all for the preservation of physical purity and innocence. This appears as a central theme in most of the prayers and meditations. The focus of the texts is generally not on sensuality but on purity, on preserving and guarding it and on suppressing any source that could arouse desire. In this way church discourse, like secular public discourse, avoided the topic of sensuality, or more precisely did not speak about it directly. By placing physical purity on a pedestal, with the aid of images, coded expressions and words it expressed its ideas of sexuality and sensuality, regarding immodesty as "the woman's most disgusting and hateful characteristic".<sup>14</sup> While the majority of the words were treated as taboo, this special, metaphorical language was used to regulate all manifestations of sexuality.<sup>15</sup>

"A flower is opening in the garden of life, more beautiful than a rose, more pleasant than a lily; a flower with a precious perfume that is pleasing to the Lord and to people. But no flower in the garden of nature is exposed to so much danger as this flower. The life-giving rays that open its buds cause it to wither; the gentle breezes wafting around it can damage it; the beneficial clouds that nourish it with dewdrops can bruise it. Yes, unless the nursing and sheltering hands of the caring gardener constantly protect it, it will soon be lost, and even all the efforts of the most careful gardener are often in vain if a worm gnaws its roots in secret and the gardener only recognises

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14 MAGYAR 1895. 259.

15 FOUCAULT 1999. 19.

the danger when it is too late to help. This beautiful, pleasant and sweetly-perfumed flower is immaculate purity, angelic innocence.”<sup>16</sup>

This extract from a sermon preached in 1895 is a good illustration of the coded images and allusions often used by members of the Catholic intelligentsia when describing female sensuality. The parallels most often used were the development and characteristics of flowers familiar as symbols of purity (rose, lily), as they quite literally provided the possibility to speak about the subject in the language of flowers. This then was the system of linguistic communications within which discourse about sexuality was allowed.<sup>17</sup> The genre of my sources also obviously justifies this representation in images. At the same time we also have many source texts which suggest that behind this language of flowers we must see not merely the linguistic communication of modesty but also a conscious opposition to scientific enlightenment. According to the Catholic view of the time the aim of enlightenment was not “to give a scholarly insight into the great laboratory of life” but to protect the morals of children, and in particular “to train the power of the will to resist”.<sup>18</sup> Otherwise there is little data available on how much women knew about sexuality. There was probably no sexual education in the schools and it is likely that mothers did not really say anything about sexuality to their daughters either. This was also part of the taboo, as we can read in a book intended for the enlightenment of older girls written by Dr. Margit Csaba in 1934. In the opinion of the Catholic woman doctor girls approaching marriage had no need to know anything about the details of sexual life. It is sufficient if they experience it after marriage, and then they should “be happy that they do not know more.”<sup>19</sup>

According to the Catholic opinion, deep religiosity, for example the frequent rereading of prayers and meditations, frequent confession and communion could be one of the most effective ways of memorising expectations and obligations and of “regulating sensual desires”.<sup>20</sup> Girls, mothers, wives, widows who prayed could recognise themselves in the series of obligations listed and with the help of the meditations could think through their own situation. We can observe in this a kind of pedagogization of the function of prayer, which was a characteristic feature of works of devotional literature of the period.<sup>21</sup> This educational character was reinforced in the edifying, moralising meditations as additional texts that appeared in the new prayer books of the period.

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16 MAGYAR 1895. 258.

17 FOUCAULT 1999. 19–20.

18 DR. KOMÓCSY 1908. 411.

19 CSABA 1934. 111–112.

20 DR. KOMÓCSY 1908. 414.

21 SAURER 1990a. 356.

“Virginity is the most beautiful pearl in the young girl’s wreath of virtues, the finest treasure of her soul, the virtue most corresponding to her state. Everything turns on it, everything stands or falls with it. Its loss is an infected youth and its possession is of greater value than all the gold in the world. [...] Be pure and modest in your morals, even when you are alone, in your thoughts and glances, in your posture and in everything you do. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>22</sup>

It can be seen that the girl’s purity became a key concept and basic motif in Catholic sources. All further virtues were derived from it, and so they were sheltered with almost obsessive fear from even the thought of sexuality. The texts of many prayers in the prayer books were intended to help in internalising and deepening the idea.

“Omnipotent God! who created man in your own image and for that reason hate everything unclean: extinguish the flame of perversity from my heart, to make it a worthy abode for the Holy Spirit. [...] Enable me to seek and love the pure joys of life and never to mistake them for or replace them with the wicked entertainments and frivolous delights of the world.”<sup>23</sup>

Naturally, the origins of this view can be found not only in the Victorian models shaped in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century; it also drew abundantly on the traditional teachings of the Catholic church.<sup>24</sup> What was new here was not the use of physical purity and various symbolic images to represent it, but its persistent thematisation and repetition.<sup>25</sup> As the topos in the title also indicates, the ideal of the Catholic clergy and intelligentsia was the girl or women who continuously suppressed her desires to prepare both body and soul to receive the Holy Spirit. A prayer text explains the favoured image in the following terms:

“The sons of the world regard this transgression as not a sin at all, or only a minor one or simply as a weakness of nature. The teaching of our holy faith, the sacred religion of Jesus Christ, is quite different. It teaches that this beastly sin dishonours God, our supreme Lord, disgraces in us Jesus Christ, as our Saviour and Head, and drives the Holy Spirit, as our Sanctifier, out of the temple of our heart.”<sup>26</sup>

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22 Ágoston 1930. 105–106.

23 DR. HALÁSZ 1924. 283–284.

24 According to this physical desire was regarded as a sin, the only sexual relations allowed were for the purpose of procreation. However, in the words of Saint Augustine, through sin “man in his conceit turned away from God and because he did not obey God he was unable to obey himself either”. His words imply that because of the loss of the original purity of the body all believers had to be constantly on guard to regulate their own bodily desires. For more detail see: SZENT Ágoston 2006: 255–257.

25 SAURER 1990a. 352.

26 DANKÓ 1866. 147.

It was also desirable to curb and regulate desires within marriage. But what was expected and allowed in the interest of health and procreation was a strictly taboo subject, especially if it concerned women.<sup>27</sup> The evidence of the prayers and meditations shows that the Catholic view continued to be based on the tenet that the principal aim of marriage was the procreation of children and so sexuality was allowed only within those frames. At the same time it was also forbidden to regulate and restrict the number of births, facing women with a serious dilemma. Dr. Margit Csaba illustrates this with many examples in her book of advice. She recounts a number of stories for her young girl readers in which married women came to her seeking an abortion. As a solution she recommended that they kill desires, suspend married life and live in fraternal coexistence.<sup>28</sup>

The prayer books obviously do not discuss this topic in such detail, the ban on birth control only appears sometimes among the questions for examination of the conscience in connection with confession. It is however quite clear from the prayers and meditation texts that the church entirely excluded the possibility of the sex act as a sacred act sanctifying marriage, or as a basic biological need. We can read about it in our sources in places as beastly (see above), and in others as something bad tolerated out of obedience to the marriage partner:

“A woman who marries must anticipate that she will be subordinated to her husband in married life, she is obliged to meet his marital requirements under pain of sin so that she does not drive her husband to infidelity and mortal sin. Marriage that is ideal in all respects is only a dream of young girls. In privileged saints, by common agreement, we see marriage partners living in virginal coexistence (Saint Emmerich) but this is only possible by common agreement as the vocation of exceptional souls, just as the monastic life. But marriage cannot be only sensual. The marriage partners are also one soul; and that is how they should be.”<sup>29</sup>

The texts also indicate that in the sexual model of the period it was always the man who took the initiative, the women’s role was passive, without instincts.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly the figure of Mary of the Immaculate Conception, embodying Christian purity, virginity and obedience was held up as the supreme example and the opposite pole to the period’s symbolic figure of the *femme fatale* that tended to extremity, eroticism and sentimentalism. This did not represent the creation of a new ideal, rather it was a focus only on certain qualities (motherhood, the pious, obedient and humble woman).<sup>31</sup> We can read about this in the next prayer:

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27 FREVERT 1986. 130.

28 DR. CSABA 1934. 18.

29 BLASKÓ 1923. 549.

30 HULL 1988. 61.

31 The period between 1850 and 1950 is often called the “Marian century” in church history. The period was framed by the dogmas of the Immaculate conception (1854) and the Assumption (1950), and the apparitions of Lourdes and Fatima also occurred during this time. The veneration of Mary



“May the lily of purity, the immaculate example of the blessed virgin Mary be always before my eyes, so that I may follow in her footsteps on the path of life. She lived in modest solitude, submitting to your holy will with all her humility; gentleness, angelic purity, forbearance were the beautiful virtues that made her so favoured to you; may I strive to win your holy pleasure through those too.”<sup>32</sup>

Thus, beside the earlier maternal figure of Mary as queen of heaven, mother of sorrows, intercessor and miracle-worker, the focus of attention turned to the virtuous Christian woman.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, instilling an awareness of the “Marian” virtues also became a part of the preparation of women for their life. This is also reflected in the expressions “faithful daughter of Mary” and “children of Mary” that appear in the titles and texts of prayer books. This thought constituted the mainstay of Catholic girls’ education launched at that time. It functioned as a call that the clergy hoped would help the faithful, in this case young girls and women, to resist the temptations of the age and keep away from the path of sin. This was important, as in the view of the clergy the moral, religious and mental renewal of the whole society could be achieved through the women and mothers. Placing Mary as the second, perfect Eve, in the focus of attention underlined this teaching.

### Keeping awake a sense of guilt

Besides emphasising purity, the other main characteristic of the Catholic view was mistrust. It saw a possibility for sin undermining morals in everything belonging to the modern bourgeois world that was taking shape at that time. All transgressions, even if only in the mind, were regarded as mortal sins. It was therefore of vital importance to keep awake a sense of guilt, curb instincts and remain vigilant. This was also extended to the inner world. The doctrine of self-observation according to which we need to have an inner eye constantly at work in order to avoid sinful thoughts, had been valid since the time of Saint Augustine.<sup>34</sup> “Act according to the basic fear that if we do what we think is sin, it is always sin.” – József Molnár advises in the spiritual mirror of the prayer book titled *Heavenly Lilac Flowers*.<sup>35</sup> Another prayer book, *Spiritual Guide*, published in Vienna in 1866 was also used as a means of keeping awake a sense of guilt. In its meditation it reminds the faithful of the punishments God meted out to fornicators:

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that had been eclipsed by the Enlightenment and rationalism, again flourished and became very popular during this period. For more details, see: BEINERT 1984. 75–116.

32 KUNSZIGETHI 1860. 380.

33 SCHLÖGL 1995. 37.

34 PLÉH 2010. 404.

35 MOLNÁR – MEISERMANN 1925. 81.

flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, it was also for these reasons that the devil strangled Sarah's seven husbands.<sup>36</sup> Then it continued:

"This is why the church too in the past ordered seven years of penitence for all forms of fornication and fifteen years for adultery. [...] think dear youth! how many sins two persons of the opposite sex can commit against purity with thoughts and curiosity if when alone they behave carelessly. How many sins can they commit in the evening, when going home from a dance, after leaving the inn? What happens in the field, in the solitary house? But God sees everything and judges. Even if you are alone, remember that God sees you, and that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit that you must preserve sacred."<sup>37</sup>

The above passage is instructive for several reasons. One is that it shows that in spite of all the efforts to instil fear, in many cases expectations and reality did not coincide. The penitences prescribed, the coded references all indicate that observing the rules was a problem for believers too. And the priests knew about those problems – for example through the institution of confession – probably at times more than they knew about the virtues of their followers or the marital successes. A kind of duality can be observed here: the silence of denial, in face of the detailed examination of the question from the moral viewpoint.<sup>38</sup> The examinations of conscience linked to confession and the spiritual mirrors that at times dealt with the topic of fornication and adultery in surprisingly exhaustive detail, also confirmed that sexual transgressions were mortal sins.

"You must know that violation of these two commandments of your free will, even if only in thought or desire, is always a mortal sin. Examine yourself then: Have I taken delight consciously in impure thoughts and desires? Have I thought with pleasure of sins of this kind that I have committed, did my unclean dreams please me consciously and willingly? Did I speak of fornication, did I laugh when hearing such talk, did I listen with pleasure to others, did I allow my subordinates to lower themselves with such talk? Were children and other innocent persons present? Did I sing dirty songs, did I write or listen with pleasure to such songs, did I teach such songs to others? [...] Did I wish to tempt others to this sin with impudent strutting, improper clothing, impure glances or winks? Did this happen in the church itself? Did I sin with excessive flattery, kisses, embraces, bold touches? Did I allow others to do such things? [...] Was I together with persons of the opposite sex at night? Did I sin there in some

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36 DANKÓ 1866. 150.

37 DANKÓ 1866. 150.

38 VERGOTE 2008. 88.

way against purity? Were those persons with whom I sinned still innocent, did I persuade them to such actions with flattery, gifts or force? Were they married or unmarried? Were they relatives, or persons dedicated to God or committed by a vow to chastity and purity? [...] Did I commit these actions in some unusual way? Was my desire directed at a creature without a soul, an animal?"<sup>39</sup>

In this way "the examination of conscience, that is intended for the practice of self-knowledge and sincerity in the faith, is deprived of its real role, and becomes primarily an instrument of self-observation aimed at stamping out sensual imaginings and involuntary physical manifestations." – writes Antoine Vergote, professor of psychology of religion.<sup>40</sup> In Foucault's opinion confession related to the sacrament of the forgiveness of sins in Catholic pastoral activity created a speech situation in which the allowed use of words, the rhetoric of codified allusions and metaphors was slightly relaxed.<sup>41</sup> Edith Saurer, who examined the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> confession guidebooks reached similar conclusions in her study on the moral usefulness of confession. She emphasised that for church pastoral activity, confession became a means of learning and teaching morals, loyalty, obedience and sincerity. It enabled the priest, who was looked upon as an educator, to transmit to the faithful the nature of sin, as religious notions of behaviour rules.<sup>42</sup> As we can read in anticlerical writings of the period, this aroused distaste in many people:

"From the pulpit they (i.e. the priests – O.F.) make the people believe that those who do not whisper in their ear all their secrets, all the family's private affairs, will go to hell. What is hell? The answer the catechism gives to this question is: "Hell is the place where the souls of the damned suffer for all eternity." Do you know what the word eternity means? Do you believe that the benevolent, wise, merciful God will condemn you to eternal suffering because you do not tell the priest your sins? Of course you believe it. Human nature is such that if we are told something often enough, in the end we believe it. With this confession the priest holds the woman in his grip, and with the woman he also holds the children and the man."<sup>43</sup>

What solution does the church offer? The main antidotes to sensuality are complete rejection, suppression and the conscience repression of feelings. Girls and women believers have to be continuously on their guard to keep these defensive

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39 MOLNÁR – MEISERMANN 1925. 81.

40 VERGOTE 2008. 87.

41 FOUCAULT 1999. 20–29.

42 SAURER 1990b 143–145.

43 A Roman Catholic citizen s.d.: [http://mtdaportal.extra.hu/books/Hallgassanak\\_a\\_papok.pdf](http://mtdaportal.extra.hu/books/Hallgassanak_a_papok.pdf)  
Accessed on: 7 March 2016.

functions in operation and if they have any problem they must seek the advice of their spiritual guide.

## Conclusion

All this appears to confirm Foucault's repression thesis: "The married couple are the model, norm, the repository of the truth, and only the couple have the right to speak about the secret. Both in the social space and in the home, within four walls, there is only one recognised, useful and productive place for sexuality: the parental bedroom. Everything outside that is lost in a fog; polite behaviour avoids physicality, polite speech sterilises the language. And sexuality for its own sake – if it is very stubborn, if it shows itself more than is desirable – is soon branded with the stigma of unnaturalness: and that also determines its status, as well as the punishment due for it."<sup>44</sup>

Linking the sex act, sometimes presented as beastly and at other times as something bad that had to be borne out of obedience to the marriage partner, with sin, interpreting it as a sin was one of the strongest cornerstones in the church's system of arguments. The excessive expectation of bodily purity was held up as the principal means of avoiding such sin. This appeared very strikingly in the prayer and meditation texts offered for young girls. The particular language used to describe with metaphors and coded allusions physical purity set on a pedestal and sacralised was centred on this thought.

We can also state that at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century, regarding the question of sexuality and sexual behaviour (and of women and their role in general) secular thinking and church thinking reinforced each other, marching arm in arm. In the early new age both the state and the church intensified the discourse on sexual behaviour and the demand for its regulation, but their interests differed. While the Catholic church focused on the individual's internal, spiritual state, the state dealt only with external order and with the fiscal aspects of the question.<sup>45</sup> The question of protecting sexual morals does not figure so prominently either in the Neolog Jewish prayer books of the period known so far or in the texts of Protestant prayer books as it did in the case of the Catholics.<sup>46</sup> In my opinion it is here, in the differences in emphasis, in internalising the sense of guilt, in the degree and scope of taboo and in the prolonged conservation of the positions, that we can observe the principal characteristics of the Catholic position.

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44 FOUCAULT 1999. 7.

45 FUCHS – THOMSON 2005. 34.

46 For a more detailed analysis of the prayer books of other denominations, see: BRANDT 2004. 16–21; BRANDT 2005. 96–127; KRATZ-RITTER 1995; SAURER 1990a 37–59; SAURER 1991. 335–358.

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