OVERCOMING INFLATED STANDARDS
A CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH TO RELATIONAL ETHICS

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary discussions on marriage and partnerships cannot ignore the fact that divorce and separation are no longer exceptions. These trends are sufficiently reflected in theological debates that focus on consequences for spouses and children, sacramental implications, etc. In contrast to this, the analysis of the challenges partners are confronted with, as well as attempts how to deal with these challenges successfully, attracted less attention.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Standards are highly relevant within marriages and partnerships. As individual conceptions, they shape the everyday life of many couples, since they are not treated by partners simply as abstractions but have a direct impact on and want to be realised within the relationship. However, these attempts at realisation can take a destructive form and become so urgent that if they are not fulfilled, separation or divorce seem inevitable.

Starting from this observation, the study aims to develop an outline for fulfilling relationships. The outline takes into account cognitive-psychological insights and rethinks their implications from a theological-ethical perspective on the basis of personal-interdisciplinary hermeneutics. Hence, the study engages with the following key questions:

(1) Why are inflated standards problematic?
(2) Where do inflated standards come from?
(3) How can marriage and partnership overcome inflated standards?

REFERENCES

PSYCHOLOGY


THEOLOGY


RESULTS

(1) Why are inflated standards problematic?
The recourse to insights of cognitive psychology on relationship-specific standards reveals that the problem of standards originates from their rigidity. Standards are, therefore, considered “inflated” if they are understood as unassailable rules.

(2) Where do inflated standards come from?
The origin of rigidity can be traced back to a variety of individual, familial, societal, psychological, and religious factors that have a strong impact on the development of standards. However, they often refer to highly simplified images that portray marriage and partnership either as a place of unity or as a place of difference, thus hiding the complexity of relational reality that cannot be resolved in an either-or manner.

(3) How can marriage and partnership overcome inflated standards?
The success of relationship presupposes the maintenance of this tension. Only by constant balancing between unity and difference can rigidity be avoided. From a virtuous-ethical perspective, this balancing can be reinterpreted as the entanglement of acceptance and devotion. Acceptance means the affirmation of difference, which does not capitulate passively in the face of human ungraspability but integrates it successfully. Devotion means the affirmation of unity, which does not act blindly in the face of human freedom but remains limited.

MARRIAGE AND PARTNERSHIP AS

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<tr>
<th>individualization</th>
<th>unlimited selfrealization</th>
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<td>gender relations</td>
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<td>family of origin</td>
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<td>media</td>
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STANDARD OF DISTANCE     STANDARD OF FUSION

ACCEPTANCE     DEDICATION

RELATIONS WITH OTHER PERSONS:

DEALING WITH ONE’S OWN STANDARDS

RESIGNATION     ACTIONISM