

Chapter 15

Error-Culture in Value-Based Organizations: A Christian Perspective



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Abstract Credible corporate culture in value-based organizations (e.g. in the non-profit sector) exists when the commitment to transparent values corresponds with the living practice. Christian companies must be measured by Christian business ethics. This makes them reliable and distinguishable as an employer and as a provider (e.g. of services) in the market. The Christian image of humans presupposes the defectiveness of men. Lived mistake-culture is therefore an essential indicator for the credible shaping of rules and relationships. I hypothesize that this aspect of Christian corporate culture has not been adequately researched yet. But there are corresponding shortcomings in practice. Closing this gap is an ambitious goal and I want to take a step into this direction.

Therefore, I present a systematic approach to how the Christian image of man is a basis of values, which should determine the mistake-culture. This includes motivation, communication, control in the company, as well as the qualification of executives and also educational measures. The image of people handling their own and the mistakes of others are intensively addressed. I want to systematically link company sociology and leadership ethics with each other, so that a Christian profile (from a Catholic point of view with ecumenical accents) can merge in theory and practice.

First, I introduce the Christian image of man as a cultural value base with its ethical implications. Following, I identify areas of application of the mistake-culture in the company. Finally, I propose some principles of Christian mistake-culture as a normative compass for organizations.

Keywords Mistakes · Errors · Failure · Human dignity · Justice · Mercy · Christian Business ethics · Image of man · Leadership ethics · Defectiveness of man

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15.1 Introduction

“Learning from your mistakes”. “We all make mistakes”! “To err is human”. “Great things never come easily”. These and other life wisdoms are like soothing balm after mistakes have been made. This also applies in everyday working life. There is not always such comfort or encouragement under the pressure of time, money, vanity and competition. Occasionally there may also be a need for warnings or sanctions. Mistakes also have a dark side, as in health care: for example, in the American study “To err is human” (see Vanderheiden and Mayer Introduction and Brommundt), conducted by the Institute of Medicine in 2000, it was found that 44,000 to 98,000 deaths in US clinics would have been preventable (cf. Bechtel 2012). So how to deal with mistakes? Is the learning effect the main focus? And what role may play punishment or forgiveness?

It is an essential part of the respective corporate culture in organizations how those affected by mistakes (e.g. those who caused the damage, those who are suffering the effects in the company, superiors, team, etc.) are dealing with or should be dealing with mistakes. It is about the normative evaluation of human mistakes and especially about the evaluation and design of the associated contexts of human interaction between the people who make mistakes and those who are affected by them (through direct or indirect physical, health, material, temporal or psychological consequences or conditioned by roles – e.g. a manager in relation to his employees – within the hierarchy of the organization or the like). Mistakes-culture (ideally and in lived practice) is thus the object of systematic reflection through corporate ethics. The practice should be aiming towards the ideal, which may be publicized in mission statements or guidelines, and should coincide with it as far as possible.

We find some recent ideas of Christian business ethics (cf., e.g. Melé and Cantón 2014; Keppeler 2014; Rohrhirsch 2013). But the idea of a coherent system of Christian business ethics is still pioneering work (cf. Nass and Kreuer 2018). An application of such theory to a corresponding culture of mistake is not yet known to me (cf. Hahn 2009). It cannot be resorted to a generally accepted model here. First and foremost, it is not easy to recapitulate a Christian culture of mistakes for companies. Rather, this requires a creative reflection.

With this goal I do not continue to differentiate between ideal and lived mistakes-culture, I formulate principles into an ideal for credibly established practice instead.¹ In this way I want to propose a normative guideline from a Christian perspective (after a Catholic point of view). Dealing with mistakes in this way has something to do with responsibility, justice, and possibly forgiveness. A concept of “mistakes - forgiveness - new beginnings” is so obvious to us that we hardly think about its Christian origin (cf. Hahn 2009). This underexposed reflection should be made here. The explicitly Christian perspective on this subject is also being demanded by

¹For a principle-based comparison of ideal and practice, cf. Jaensch et al. (2015) with a view to a diaconal corporate culture. Empirical surveys are required as next steps into practice, which could apply these principles.

representatives of secular philosophy. For example, Charles Taylor recognizes that the Christian faith can offer a much better argumentative foundation for forgiveness, love, and justice than secular theories do. This has two consequences: (1) Christians should express such justifications, and (2) secular people can learn something about their self-understanding and how they interact with each other (cf. Taylor 2007; Kühnlein 2018; Wenzel 2013).

The guideline proposed in this chapter is not simply a Decalogue compiled in laborious diligence from guidelines of Christian organizations, for example, in the health and social services. As far as the mistakes-culture is concerned, there is too little to be found in such sources (cf. Hahn 2009). I develop such reflected theses as thought-provoking impulses on the basis of the Christian image of man, for mission statements and even more for lived practice. I will explain the concept of mistake first and will identify organizations or contexts for which a Christian mistakes-culture is an ideal or a challenge second. I will outline the ethical standards at last and finally present some examples of application in the field of tension between ideal and practice.

15.2 Focus on Mistakes

I define first, which working life situations will be considered as mistakes and which not.² Undoubtedly, I am reducing complexity, to help focus on the essential issues.

Mistakes in working life can be of very different character. I propose to differentiate exemplary four types:

1. Objective and technical mistakes: A hospital nurse confuses the medication of a patient.
2. Mistakes of estimation: The supervisory board has appointed a new manager which, although he presents himself splendidly, was already known to other companies as an opportunistic “grasshopper”. Soon after his appointment, he turns out to show his real character again with corresponding negative effects for the company.
3. Strategic mistake: An employee of the research institute, which depends on money, sharply criticizes the representative of the potential sponsor at a meeting for his late arrival.
4. Moral mistake: A group leader learns about the death in the closest family of an employee, who is visibly affected by it. The supervisor chooses to ignore this information, shows no empathy and urges to keep working concentrated instead (see Ryan in this book).

²Differences are made between mistakes (as wrong behaviour), errors (e.g. in a scientific or mathematical sense) and failure (consequence of mistakes and mistakes). In this article mistakes are the core of reflection.

The first case is clearly identifiable as a mistake. The second to fourth examples enable diverse interpretations which could come to different conclusions. The examples are merely intended to illustrate the different “quality” of mistakes, irrespective of the concrete evaluation. I will simply assume that all four examples can be classified as mistakes. But what connects and what separates technical, estimative, strategic and moral mistakes?

Definition 1

Mistakes have in common that an alternative behaviour would be preferable in each case and those responsible could have known or done it better.

I can identify mistakes clearly under such circumstances. It becomes more difficult, if one of these conditions is not fulfilled, like in the following varied situations:

- A patient absolutely and immediately needs a certain medical compound, which is not available. A substitute substance is taken which does not achieve the full effect. This is objectively considered a mistake, but could not be avoided in the concrete situation, as there was no better alternative.
- If the applicant for the management board position was a blank piece of paper, if he presented himself well, if everything was perfectly examined and if the supervisory board also wanted to offer a chance to younger managers, the nature of the new manager, which later turns out to be negative, could not have been predicted. This situation remains objectively and retrospectively a mistake that could not be foreseen. With the preconditions the members of the supervisory board could not have known better.

I will not discuss such and even more complex constellations, because they challenge us to identify certain situations as mistakes at all. This debate is not part of my [comprehensive treatise](#). I do not wish to continue that reflection any longer, although this might be part of a paper with a different focus. My question therefore should be how should it responsibly be dealt with clearly identified mistakes in working live (see examples 1–4 on the basis of Definition 1). With this simplification, I can now narrow down my definition of mistakes and focus on small, but important, differences (cf. Unger 2009).

Additionally, I can also take into account what certain types of mistakes have or have not in common. A separating factor in my examples is that it must be applied in each case in order to identify the preferred situation. As mentioned in the situations above, this is (1) compliance with the patient’s prescribed medication, (2) careful interpretation of existing facts, (3) careful consideration of the benefits and harms of an action and (4) orientation towards a moral idea of the good. From this follows my expanded definition:

Definition 2

The mistakes I am looking at here are clearly violations of objective and prudent reasonableness, wisdom and morality, to which there are preferable alternatives that could and should have been chosen by those responsible.³

15.3 Focus on Value-Based Organizations

Errors and mistakes happen wherever people interact and take responsibility. I will focus particularly on organizations for which a credible Christian corporate culture and thus also a mistakes-culture can, should or must be relevant (see also Ryan and Hallay-Witte and Janssen in this book). I think of expressly Christian organizations and agencies first, such as churches (including pastoral care, administration, diplomacy), Diaconia, Caritas and other Christian charities; foundations and associations (such as Christian Scouts, Kolping, etc.); and political associations or their substructures with a Christian claim (Christians in the Socialist Party, etc.). This also applies to all other companies, sponsors and organizations that profess a Christian culture in their mission statement, vision and mission. This can also be for-profit companies led by Christian leaders, with or without a public confession. Furthermore, Christianity always has the claim to have an inviting effect on society (cf. Taylor 2007): as light of the world, as a leaven and in this sense missionary. This mission is not to be understood aggressively (cf. Zerth et al. 2015). Rather, the credible idea and practice of a Christian way of living together (and to this belongs also the handling of mistakes), wanting to set an example from which non-Christian organizations and non-Christians can get orientation. In this sense the profiling of a Christian mistakes-culture is not only part of an internal morality, but also an example of good human cooperation beyond this context. Other organizations without Christian reference can get an orientation or a challenge but with comparable images of man and value priorities. The principles must also be communicable in not expressly Christian contexts, without abandoning my own level of justification (reference to Jesus Christ and the Holy Scripture).

I propose principles of Christian mistake culture, which want to be understood as normative mirrors for various Christian organizational contexts and also as a winning invitation to other value-based cultures (cf. Nass and Kreuer 2018).

³Further differentiations could be well justified here. Taking the focus of this contribution into account, I will limit myself to a simplification, which is undoubtedly only exemplary.

15.4 Focus on Moral Mistakes

After the mistake definition and the defined field of application, I now will present relevant aspects of the Christian conception of mankind, the guideline. It will help us to identify from this point of view the mistakes-culture in organizations. I take moral mistakes as our starting point, since those also impair the relationship of man with God in theology and are especially important. One can distinguish between two kinds of moral mistakes. The first kind is based on a free, conscious decision and is therefore a culpable breach. The second type of moral mistakes base on not intended actions (cf. Büschges et al. 1998, pp. 89–92). These consequences (as failure) happen by chance or are based on negligence. The second type of mistake is only morally relevant if they are intrinsically evil (e.g. a so-called *intrinsece malum*) (cf. Demmer 1987). For example, a child runs accidentally in front of a truck and dies as a consequence; the killing per se remains a bad act. However, the attentive truck driver could not be morally certified to have made a mistake. Such differentiations in turn have a very high potential for complexity. I therefore concentrate in this article on situations which can intuitively be regarded as moral mistakes from a Christian point of view. Taking this for granted, I can draw conclusions for dealing with different types of mistakes.⁴

15.5 Human Dignity and Limits as a Point of View

On the one hand, human beings are created as God's images as written in the biblical story of creation (*Old Testament*). Thus, humans have a prominent position within creation, which justifies the unique quality of the inviolable dignity of every person. Although human individuals are not equally talented, they are nevertheless equally worthy. The dignity of men should not be measured in terms of qualities such as health, intelligence or age, nor should the dignity of a human being be attributed or denied by political parties, the economy or powerful people. The same dignity is rather a non-negotiable characteristic, which can't be lost through technical or moral mistakes.

On the other hand, humans are different from God, because they are defective and, also seducible to guilt or sin. This is described paradigmatically in the biblical story of Adam and Eve in paradise, through rich images. It phrases clearly, that humans are, in spite of their creation as image of God, different. The degree of this separation is judged differently in the Christian denominations. According to

⁴Even factual, technical and other mistakes should not be assessed just in terms of the act. The consequences are as important as the actual mistake. Examples are as follows: a patient suffers serious damage as a result of a confused medication, and a company has to pay high fines due to incorrect accounting.

Catholic understanding, there remains a remnant of good-being in mankind even after being expelled from paradise. God gives us the ability to distinguish between good and evil. He also provides humans with garments of skins (Gen 3:21f.). As a conclusion people also have an active part in their salvation from God.⁵ According to Luther's interpretation, the relationship between humans and God is initially fundamentally shattered. Only through God's grace humans escape their ruin. The redemptive work of Jesus as a second Adam and the theological doctrine of original sin and grace play an essential role for this distinction. I do not want to deepen that thought further. It is important to note that the consequence of God's appearance through Jesus Christ is that every human being is called to discipleship with all their faults and sinfulness. The biographies of the apostles and the first great confessors (such as Saulus becoming Paulus) prove that even faulty human beings are called to discipleship. The nomination can be by God's grace or with the participation of the persons own moral achievements. With the central decision to follow Christ, people do not lose their attribute of sinfulness. Let us remember St. Peter, who denies Jesus three times during the night of Good Friday. Yet St. Peter is the rock on which the foundation of the church was built. So even the closest disciples of Jesus have made mistakes. This is due to the fact that I am never and I will never be the same as God. Such an essential existential of being human explains the special bond between humans and Jesus. He is God and human. And in this very complex symbiosis, he is a human being in everything except that he doesn't sin. The apostle Paul emphasizes this in the Epistle to the Romans a lasting human trait:

For the good which I have a mind to do, I do not: but the evil which I have no mind to do, that I do. But if I do what I have no mind to do, it is no longer I who do it, but the sin living in me. So, I see a law that, though I have a mind to do good, evil is present in me. In my heart I take pleasure in the law of God, But I see another law in my body, working against the law of my mind, and making me the servant of the law of sin which is in my flesh. (Rom 7:19-23)⁶

So, the sinfulness of mankind remains our dominant characteristic, and seduction is also a possible trait even for saints and apostles. If this dark side of moral mistake is intrinsically attached to us from a Christian point of view, then how much more likely is the seduction to err, to produce factual mistakes or even mistakes of estimation. To err is therefore deeply human. No one can free themselves. On the other hand, no one loses dignity through it.

⁵ Cf. Chap. 8 in this article.

⁶ Cf. to a Catholic interpretation Anzenbacher (2001), 167, to a Protestant interpretation Frey et al. (1997), 78. Even in the Calvinist or Puritan doctrine of predestination, the occurrence of misconduct is not proof that God has deprived man of their grace. This refers to the predestined, as to all sinners. Cf. Weber (2000), 333.

15.6 Focus on Responsibility

From a Christian point of view, people bear a responsibility that is threefold: It follows the threefold commandment of love (Lk 10:27), given by Jesus. As a moral existence, in accordance with the biblical commandment of love, humans also carry this responsibility (cf. Nass and Kreuer 2018):

- Towards God: It is expressed by understanding life in the light of the Creator God, by being thankful for his gift and by developing freedom as a moral being in this light.
- Towards oneself: It is expressed by the self-awareness to be a creation in the image of God with an unconditional dignity and at the same time by recognizing the undivided dignity of the weak.
- Towards fellow humans: It is expressed by acts of concrete charity on the one hand and by the service for community life out of an affective spirit of social love on the other hand.

It is a moral mistake, if we do not take this threefold responsibility seriously. This does not mean that we lose our dignity. Nevertheless, a conscious, culpable or even negligent violation of it does not remain without consequences for our relationship with God. Taking this responsibility, which also derives from our talents, is – from a Catholic point of view – our active contribution to living accordingly to God’s salvific mission.

Example: Threefold Responsible Behaviour in Theory and Practice

It is for example the doctor’s responsibility not go to the operating theatre overtired, after working several shifts. At the same time, he has the responsibility to take care for himself and his body, because it is a gift from God. He also has a responsibility towards God, which always mirrors in self-love and charity. Not letting his personal relationship with God die despite work is an important aspect. Man has to take responsibility for his actions before God in the end. If we do not take responsibility in an appropriate way, we do something bad. This will distance us from other people and ourselves and also from God. Such self-caused remoteness from God, however, does not mean a loss of dignity, because we always remain God’s image. Through God’s grace we are always capable and get his reconciliation. Accordingly, even godless man has full dignity but at the same time the moral duty to change something in his life so that he can overcome the distance. This possibility exists until the moment of death. This means that potential for the good remains the whole life. This empowerment is also part of dignity and goodness, even as a godless man. In a Christian way of living, it is a matter of course to support one another to take one’s responsibility and to follow God. Especially Christian leaders need to keep this in mind.

If we do not develop and use our potentials to build a good relationship between other humans and within the church community, then it is a violation of God's mandate. There is a duty to responsibility. In accordance with the principle of "Ultra posse nemo tenetur" (cf. Schockenhoff 2007, 375)⁷, however, it must be ensured that the taken responsibility does not exceed one's own talents. Repetitive overstrain and overestimation of one's own self or of others are violations of the responsibility between one's relationship with himself, others or God. If this principle is adhered to, taking responsibility means on the one hand to have the freedom to express oneself and on the other hand to make mistakes. Whoever won't use his talents may not make any mistakes, but also squanders his God-given talents. This is reprehensible from a Christian point of view (Mt: 25,14–30).

Christian life is a risk. Mistakes can therefore also be proof of one's courage. And this deserves recognition. A better life before God is therefore led by one who takes responsibility and makes mistakes. One who assumes no responsibility and makes no mistakes should rethink his attitude. A conscientious doctor is, e.g. called to an operation on short notice and makes a factual mistake without intention. He cannot be put in a moral position, which is worse than the doctor's who would have been on duty but preferred to have a nice afternoon with a cup of coffee.

Every human talent means – from a Christian point of view – great (and also moral) responsibility towards God, ourselves and others. Because other lives and fates may depend on one's actions. The answer to mistakes must be justice and mercy in equal measure.

15.7 Focus on Justice and Mercy

Legal or other sanctions in the sense of justice can produce a learning effect in humans as well as gifted and unexpected mercy and forgiveness. For example, Thomas Aquinas identified transactional justice (in Latin, *iustitia commutativa*) with recourse to Aristotle as a fundamental value. According to this a mistake must have an adequate penalty as a consequence. Taking this into consideration there must be rules (such as laws) to prevent arbitrariness. They are considered fair from a Christian point of view when they correspond to salvific purpose of humans.

⁷The principle can be translated as follows: Nobody should be obliged to do something that he cannot afford with good reason.

Salvation of man through God means in the moment of the last judgment the salvation of man, despite his mistakes.⁸ In earthly existence, the free-deciding and thus responsible person should also be empowered by rules to hear the call of God and to say yes to God. There is no safe guarantee for this salvation in the end. It matters how people live here. God takes our freedom and responsibility seriously. Therefore, from the Christian point of view, the final judgment of God will be closely related to man's earthly life. How exactly this judgment looks like remains speculative and can only be approximated in ecclesiastical life. God Himself is the judge with infinite freedom that transcends all human and theological thinking and speculation.⁹ God's judgment must and cannot be anticipated on earth. Righteous retaliation or punishment are not simply determined by this. However, they must not go beyond the commandment of the *iustitia commutativa* (for instance, in the sense of a retaliation or an example set as a deterrent) and must always consider mercy towards the person concerned (cf. Kasper, 2012, 187; Benedict XVI., 2005). Punishment as a response to mistakes is therefore justifiable in Christian terms but must be moderate. God does not deprive his love, even if you make mistakes.¹⁰

Moral mistakes (such as intrigue, aggression, ambush, false testimony, broken promises, etc.) not only damage the relationship with God but also destroy one's relationship with others and with oneself. Such self-inflicted bondages cannot be overcome alone (cf. Schockenhoff 2007, 365 f.), either the non-sacramental tradition of Luther or the sacramental tradition (Catholic and Orthodox) know about reconciliation. I propose this reconciliation logic for moral mistakes as a systematic orientation for a Christian mistakes-culture and refer especially on the Catholic tradition, which is my focus. I will now sketch it out to relate it to other types of mistakes beyond the narrow theological context of morality and sacraments. Catholic penance consists of four steps:¹¹

⁸“Salvation” in the NT is the epitome of consummation of all human desire for truth and life, freedom and love in God, the creator and finisher of his creature. The eternal salvific will of God gains historical form in his acts of salvation, salvation and liberation. Salvation is therefore not a state of human condition different from God. Rather, salvation in the universal sense is God Himself insofar as He is present in the creaturely self-fulfillment of man as the author and goal of life (cf. Müller 2010, 373). Such deeds mean, for example, forgiveness, mercy, eternal life after death and so on.

⁹Whether hell is empty or not, as it is exactly with the grace of God and the reward for a good life, these are not only dogmatic issues controversial in ecumenical-theological dialogue, which are not discussed further. Cf. for a deepening from a Catholic point of view Müller (2010), pp. 553–568.

¹⁰Jesus expressly fights serious offences against the Holy Spirit, because they are especially serious. However, the evaluation of the demonic leads us off topic. Cf. for this topic, e.g. Nass (2015).

¹¹Cf. Müller (2010): 714 with reference to the Council of Florence in 1439 A.D. My basis is therefore a Catholic perspective. Beyond the catholic sacramentality of penance a comparable logic can also be found in the Protestant tradition by applying the justification idea of the “*sola gratia*”. Cf. Bonhoeffer (2010): pp. 134–136.

1. Repentance: It describes a guilty person's honest feeling of pain about the moral mistake. It also implies the serious intention to do better in the future.¹²
2. Oral confession: The offender stands up openly for the mistake.
3. Forgiveness: In the Sacrament it is the priest who (on behalf of the Church) explicitly pronounces absolution.
4. Penitential work: The penitent is given a penitential task to be performed. In the sense of barter justice, it must not be unreasonably. In the sense of mercy, it may also have a measure which lies below "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth".

These four steps can be detached from the ecclesiastical sacrament in the Catholic tradition. They can also be besides purely moral context – a template for Christian mistakes-culture in organizations.¹³ We can derive the following characteristic:

Forgiveness

Honest repentance, standing up for one's own mistakes, a punishment not exceeding the measure of exchange justice as a reaction, an exculpation by superiors or affected persons directed towards the culprit and an associated ticking off of the respective mistake without further postcards¹⁴ are characteristics for forgiveness within the frame of a Christian mistakes-culture.

This logic does not work, if there is no honest repentance or if one's own mistake is attributed to others.¹⁵ In such cases the perpetrator does not lose his dignity, but through a Catholic perspective, he remains reconciled with himself, with God and with those affected by the mistake. For example, Cain is ejected from the community after he murdered his innocent brother Abel. To his snappish question "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9), he is prophesied restlessness (Gen 4:12) (cf. Schockenhoff 2007: 370 f.). Christians nevertheless believe that God can respond to such lack of understanding with mercy and reconciliation. As a principle for a Christian mistakes-culture, the love that transcends peoples' capacity is not helpful, because people are neither equal to God nor angels.¹⁶

¹²On feelings of guilt, conscience and the inner judgment of man cf. Schockenhoff (2007), pp. 365–372.

¹³Trying to transfer such an ecclesiastical idea of confession as a model for a culture of mistakes in organizations is undoubtedly a pioneering work.

¹⁴This sustained forgiveness is based on a spirit of mercy that accompanies the commandment of justice. Cf. Kasper (2012), pp. 161–163.

¹⁵Cf., for example, the descriptions of the Protestant pastor Matthias Storck (2017). His biological father, who was also a pastor, betrayed him to the so called "Staatssicherheit" (Stasi). Storck could not forgive his father as long as he did not admit his guilt.

¹⁶I have already mentioned this above during the introduction of the Christian image of man in reference to the Epistle to the Romans.

Thomas Aquinas, for example, admitted that all the earth's goods belong to all human beings, because they are a gift from God. People are not completely selfless and also have an egoistic streak. As a result, rules are needed that curb that negative side of humans to avoid greater harm. Thomas justifies from his Christian perspective private ownership as a secondary but necessary natural right. It is a secondary right because it is derived (cf. STh II-II, 66,2 f., Höffner 2011, 212–217, Nass 2013). It is also the same with stubborn people. They may experience mercy from God's judgment. On earth, however, people who interact with narrow individuals must be protected from those ignorance's consequences. They also must be guarded from further mistakes and their consequences as well as from contagious moral decomposition. Luther justifies secular rules with his two-regimental doctrine (cf. Frey 1998). According to him, God's law of love does not yet prevail in this world, because the kingdom of God battles with the empire of evil. Our world is in between this battle. Therefore, we need rules, laws, sanctions and punishments which are not always identical with God's mercy. The result is nearly the same as Thomas'.

15.8 Principles of Christian Mistakes-Culture

I will now systematically record (not only from a Catholic view) on the basis of my remarks on dignity, responsibility, justice and mercy some principles of Christian mistakes-culture. These principles affect those involved in the mistakes or those affected by it with varying intensity.

Untouched dignity: We encounter people who made a mistake as someone with full dignity. The value of the individual won't be reduced through a mistake.

Modesty: We are aware of the fact that we also happen to make mistakes.

Responsibility for each other: We help each other to learn from mistakes. This affects one of the essential responsibilities of man (towards God, themselves and others) in order to reduce or overcome the caused distance from God.

Praise of mistake: Christian life requires taking appropriate responsibility. This increases the risk of mistake. Mistakes can therefore also be an expression of a conscientious Christian life and even deserve positive recognition in this view.

Mercy and forgiveness: Mercy and forgiveness of the superior or of those affected by mistakes presupposes honest repentance, admission and active proof of good will on the part of the causer and should bring about honest forgiveness of the mistakes made and their consequences on the part of those affected by the mistake.

Justice: When there is no insight or where future (moral, physical, health, material, temporal or mental) damages to third parties must be prevented, sanctions and punishments are also permitted or required, but must not exceed the degree of barter justice. This does not damage the dignity of the punished person.¹⁷

The principles presented here are no more and no less than a guide to Christian mistake-culture. On the one hand, they want to be a concrete orientation for Christian leaders or for leaders in Christian organizations. This is the virtuous side. On the other hand, they also want to be an orientation for corresponding rules in the company, which, for example, set patterns in corporate models (e.g. mission statements) or operationalizations for the appropriate handling of mistakes in the organization. This is the institutional ethical side.

15.9 Conclusion

It can now be stated: The secular invitation of C. Taylor and the lack of a present system of Christian mistake-culture in organizations are essential motivating challenges for this article. They invite us to close the research gap in the framework of ethics and to explicitly argue Christianly. This project will be tackled with this article in a first step.

To this end, the following have been done: (1) Who speaks of mistake-culture must first define transparently what is meant by mistakes. This was done here with the two definitions at the beginning. (2) It is also necessary to identify the context for which such a culture should be investigated. For this purpose, especially Christian and Christian-led organizations were identified. But there is also the claim that this culture can be applied beyond such limits. (3) When speaking of a Christian culture of mistakes, its essential principles must be presented and substantiated. This was done mainly on the basis of the Bible and on the basis of theological thinkers (Thomas Aquinas, Benedict XVI, Christopher Frey, Joseph Höffner, Gerhard Ludwig Müller, Walter Kasper, etc.). The Christian image of man with its good

¹⁷Thanks to Johanna Karl for linguistic support.

foundation of dignity despite human imperfection and the threefold humane responsibility establish an interplay of justice and forgiveness. This can be found in the ecclesial understanding of penance and reconciliation as a ritual or sacramental institution. Their essence is the model for the principles presented here. They want to be a virtuous and institutional ethical orientation for organizations. These principles of a Christian culture of mistakes are thus proposed as a credible orientation for a Christian corporate culture.

As the following steps in the research on a Christian mistake culture, I see the following: (1) Critical verification of the completeness of the proposed principles, (2) confrontation of the principles with case studies from practice, (3) institution ethical application of the principles and their empirical evaluation and (4) discussion of such principles and their implementation with alternative concepts and mutual enrichment in dialogue in terms of stringency in argumentation and practicality.

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