

CELIBACY IN CONTEMPORARY WRITING

PAUL VI remarks in the encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* that 'today ecclesiastical celibacy has been examined from the doctrinal, historical, sociological, psychological and pastoral point of view'.¹ As a glance at any recent number of the *Catholic Periodicals Index* will show, none of these fields has been left fallow by english writers on the subject or by those whose work is available in translation. It would be impossible, then, for a survey of this scope to include even a fraction of the more significant books and articles. What follows is therefore limited to three modest objectives: to offer a selection, necessarily a little arbitrary, of current titles; to indicate the main areas of consensus and disagreement; and to draw attention to approaches and arguments which, without necessarily being representative of any group of writers, might provoke thought or indicate lines of study or discussion.

The fundamental motive of celibacy

It will be well to start by mentioning three points which in principle command general agreement. First, priestly celibacy and religious celibacy are identical, at least insofar as their content is concerned.² Priestly celibacy is not a matter of 'cultic purity' nor, primarily, is it to be defended on purely practical grounds. The decree on the priesthood has ratified the view that priestly celibacy, like that of the religious, is 'for the kingdom'. Hence, if we set aside for the moment the problem of mandatory celibacy, we can discuss the subject in terms which hold true both of the religious and the secular priest.

Secondly, current writing in general is sensitive to the need to avoid commending celibacy in a manner that might imply a scorn of the body or a disparagement of marriage, though, as we shall see, many writers still evince an outlook that falls short of their principles in this matter.

Thirdly, it is generally conceded that, in the past, celibacy gained support from many motives that it would be difficult to square with a balanced theology. The importance of the different forces detectable in the historical development of celibacy, is of course differently assessed on the two sides of the debate.³ Nevertheless, it is generally admitted that alongside considerations which are held to be valid today, advocates of celibacy in the past have relied heavily on extremely dubious arguments.

The New Testament text most frequently quoted by writers on celibacy is probably Mt 19, 12. 'There are some who have made themselves eunuchs for

¹ Par 5. C.T.S. London 1967, english translation.

² Schillebeeckx E., O.P.: *Clerical Celibacy under Fire* (London, 1968), p 113.

³ On the historical development of clerical celibacy in the west, cf Schillebeeckx, *op. cit.* pp 44-62.

the sake of the kingdom of heaven'.¹ This provides Schillebeeckx with the main scriptural basis of his well-known definition of celibacy as 'an existential inability to do otherwise'. 'In view of their joy on finding the hidden pearl, some people cannot do otherwise than live unmarried. This religious experience itself makes them unmarriageable; their heart is where their treasure is'.² Schillebeeckx is not so naïve as to suppose that the call of the kingdom is always so compelling as to make a law of celibacy superfluous. Nevertheless the law derives its significance from the religious experience which is the ultimate foundation of celibacy. At the kernel of celibacy there is, then, an insight which transcends the merely reasonable. It is chosen not because abstract considerations commend it as the higher course but, ultimately, because the demands of the kingdom make themselves felt in a particular way. As Richard Egenter puts it: 'There is ultimately only *one* legitimate basic motive for christian virginity – not a disparagement or a rejection of marriage and the sexual domain, not an 'angelic life' in the sense of a life lived in the spirit with the body and everything corporeal suppressed as much as possible, not the ascetic goal of complete mastery over the sexual urges, but solely the Lord (1 Cor 7, 32–34), and the kingdom of God which has been made manifest to him (Mt 19, 12).'³

This can, and of course must, be expressed in terms of love. The 'inability to do otherwise' results from the captivation not of a 'cause' but of a person. And to talk about virginity in terms of *love* is to lay bare a difficulty that may not be apparent so long as we think of the celibate as a man completely given to a value. It must be admitted that many authors do not avoid overtones of what Schillebeeckx calls the false dichotomy between God and man. It is not always made clear how the celibate's love for God, while incompatible with marriage, does not by the same token constitute an impediment to other human relationships as well. Thus while it could not be said that the overall view of Fr Örsy's well-known book on the religious life is anything but splendidly balanced, a passage such as the following describes the love of God in terms that might leave the reader wondering where other people come in at all:

The union enframed by virginity is the common union of all christians

¹ For the biblical background to celibacy the reader is referred to Legrand, Lucien: *The Biblical Doctrine of Virginity* (London 1963); Grelot, Pierre: *Man and Wife in Scripture* (London, 1964), and Sister Jeanne d'Arc O.P.: 'Chastity and Consecrated Virginity in the Old and New Testaments', in *Chastity* (London, 1955).

Mt 19, 12, is discussed in detail by Blinzer, J.: 'Eisin eunouchoi', in *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 48 (1957), pp 254–70. For a more restricted interpretation of this text, cf Blenkinsopp J: *Celibacy, Ministry, Church* (London, 1969). In Blenkinsopp's view, the intention of Jesus is too tied to his particular eschatological outlook for the text to possess the significance that Schillebeeckx gives it, pp 35, 41.

² Schillebeeckx: *op. cit.*, p 15.

³ Auer, Alfons; Egenter, Richard; O'Connor, Fergal O.P.: *Celibacy and Virginity* (Dublin, 1968), p. 89. In addition to the three main articles, the book contains an introductory essay by Rosemary Haughton.

with the three divine persons. The specific gift of virginity is a certain transparency of this union in our consciousness, an obscure personal experience of God's personal presence, which is so strong in its weakness that it calls a man away from human companionship and installs him in God's recreating friendship. No person could desire virginity unless he found another person who is more lovable than any man.¹

It is the merit of an article by J. J. Sikora that it does justice to the celibate religious both as a social being and as a person caught up in a unique love relationship with God.² Borrowing a distinction made by Maritain in his *Carnet de notes*, Sikora divides human love into two types: *amour d'amitié* and *amour de folie*. Love unto folly is a love that goes beyond ordinary friendship. 'In it there is not only a complete sharing of goods but even a complete unreserved mutual self-giving. Love unto folly when it has God as its object is utterly incompatible with another such simultaneous love in the order of sexual relations and is indeed utterly transcendent in relation to such a love'. It does not exclude other loves of friendship, but does exclude other loves like this. A person cannot have two 'alls'. In short, then, whether we talk about the existential inability to do otherwise, or whether we talk about love, the starting-point for an account of celibacy can only be in terms of a religious value. This value does not mean that the claims of God are set in competition with those of our neighbour, but it does exclude one human relationship, the relationship we call 'being in love'. That it does so is not a conclusion that can be demonstrated. It is a datum of religious experience.

Celibacy as witness

Of course, when the 'one legitimate motive' has been spelt out, there is a great deal about celibacy which remains to be said. First of all the basic motive, the Lord and the kingdom, resolves itself through the lived experience of celibacy into various forms. As Egenter observes:

The full fruits and the full value of virginity are experienced only by those who are aware of and who accept the wide spectrum of possible motives for virginity and who can find the right point within that spectrum, the point most suited to their own personality and to their vocation, as the centre of gravity around which their life of virginity will be balanced.³

Furthermore, as well as being a particular consecration, celibacy is also a 'sign'. Its sign value Schillebeeckx calls an 'unavoidable accompaniment of christian celibacy', since in it a value that transcends the purely secular stands revealed. For Moran and Harris, the celibate is the outsider who intrudes into society another standard than that of mere normality:

The life that cannot be called normal challenges the meaning of nor-

¹ Örsy, Ladislav M., S.J.: *Open to the Spirit* (London, 1968), p 87.

² Sikora J. J., S.J.: 'Chastity and Love', in *Review for Religious*, vol 27, January 1968.

³ *Celibacy and Virginity*, p 89.

mality and forces us to question the norms of human life. Fortunately the human race does not need many poets or prophets and madmen, but it cannot get along at all without a few of them.¹

Celibacy, then, is both a personal consecration and at the same time a sign or witness. Needless to say, it is a sign only to the extent to which it gives expression to authentic religious motives. As Schillebeeckx points out, celibacy as such is not a supernatural value, but a state of life meaningful in human terms.² Only when it is somehow perceptible – however obscurely – that celibacy is embraced and lived for the kingdom of God, does it stand as an insoluble question mark to the world.

Account must be taken, then, of the far-reaching ways in which celibacy both conditions the outlook and character of the person who embraces it and has the value of a witness in the Church. This is why the point needs to be underlined that celibacy is ordered not to personal fulfilment but to the Church.³ Lived within the Church it manifests the transcendent element in the Church. It is a sign of the kingdom whose values are the world's values turned upside down.⁴ It possesses this sign value not because the celibate travels by a road utterly remote from the one followed by other christians (as though there are christians *and* religious) but because 'what is inherent in the Church of God becomes visible in the professed virgin'.⁵

It is the task of the theology of celibacy to elaborate these inter-related aspects of the subject, personal transformation and witness to the world. Before looking at some of the ways in which this is done, it will be well to mention a difficulty which spiritual writing on virginity sometimes raises. It is tempting to judge such writing by the degree to which, in addition to being scripturally founded and theologically sound, it is likely to appeal to the modern christian reader unfamiliar with the language of the subculture which is religious life.⁶ Certainly the language of many writers is little suited to convey their point except to those who are on the verge of seeing it anyway. Nevertheless, it is only fair to remember that the basic reasons that arise from scripture

¹ Moran, G. and Harris, M.: *Experiences in Community* (London, 1968), p 41.

² Schillebeeckx *op. cit.*, p 105.

³ Auer, Alfons: 'The meaning of celibacy', in *The Furrow*, Vol 18, no 6, June 1967, p 303. (This article is re-printed in *Celibacy and Virginity*.)

⁴ Legrand *op. cit.*, p 45.

⁵ Klimish, Mary Jane, O.S.B.: *The one Bride: The Church and Consecrated Virginity* (New York, 1965), p 99.

⁶ On the grounds that the main purpose of the decree on the ministry and life of priests is to commend values to the priest of today, Joseph Lécuyer, writing in the *Vorgrimler Commentary*, is slightly critical of the use made by the decree of the idea of spiritual pater-nity. 'There is clearly some doubt today whether the intrinsically profound idea of 'fatherhood in Christ' . . . still has any special appeal to the priests of today. At all events it does not appeal to the younger ones, and it is these very ones who require stronger motives and more authentic experience in order to accept the heart of celibacy, and live it out'. *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vorgrimler, Herbert (ed), vol 4 (London, 1969), p 286.

cannot have an equal appeal for everyone. Nor is it always possible to talk about these matters in the language of the market-place. Not everything that needs to be said about consecrated celibacy will find an immediate echo in every twentieth century mind.

A case in point is the fundamental connection between consecrated virginity and the 'virginal Church', the Church which looks to Christ as her 'bridegroom'. Through baptism each christian receives the life of Christ and hence some share in the life of the Church. As von Hildebrand put it many years ago, 'like the Church herself, every member of Christ's mystical body is a bride of Jesus'.¹ Each christian, then, whatever his special vocation, is a bride of Christ. In the professed virgin this becomes visible.² The idea conveyed by the bride image of waiting on God is typified in Mary, and as Schillebeeckx remarks, it was the recognition of Mary's virginity in the Church that did much to rid the christian idea of virginity of pagan elements.³

Virginity also betokens the last day. The celibate is not likely to be a complete stranger to the longing to be dissolved and with Christ. Lived in the spirit in which it was chosen, virginity, then, proclaims in a particularly striking way belief in a fulfilment beyond this life. Sister Mary Klimish, in her book *Church and consecrated Virginity*, expresses this, perhaps a little ebulliently, as follows: 'Her chastity affirms that Christ is her bridegroom and that there will be no nuptials in heaven save with him. . . . She thus proclaims that this present world is coming to an end in favour of a new heaven and earth. She does not panic over this fact but awaits the end with hope and longing'.⁴ The same essential point is made by Rosemary Haughton when she defines the celibate as 'expressing professionally the christian dedication to death'.⁵ Sister Klimish goes on to offer another general category which usefully gathers together several aspects of celibacy both as a witness and consecration: virginity is a sign of lasting values.⁶ It therefore proclaims the primacy of the spiritual over the material.⁷ It is a tactical strong-point in the struggle between acceptance of the world and its rejection.⁸ Leaving aside the problems of mandatory celibacy and the question of priests or religious who come to regret their choice, Schillebeeckx observes that celibacy in itself is so linked with religious values that it can only be a theoretical problem where the appreciation of such values has diminished.⁹

Celibacy and the Cross

A particular religious value which celibacy simultaneously affirms and lives out is that of the cross. The scriptural basis of this connection is illus-

¹ von Hildebrand, Dietrich: *In Defence of Purity* (London, 1931), p 140.

² Klimish *op. cit.*, p 97.

⁴ Klimish *op. cit.*, p 205.

⁶ Klimish *op. cit.*, p 206.

⁸ Görres, Ida Friederike: *Is Celibacy Outdated?* (Cork, 1965), p 18.

⁹ Schillebeeckx *op. cit.*, p 82.

³ Schillebeeckx *op. cit.*, p 50.

⁵ *Celibacy and Virginity*, p 12.

⁷ *loc. cit.*

trated by Legrand in terms of Mary.¹ The humiliation (*tapeinosis*) of Mary is precisely that of being a virgin, deprived of the joys of motherhood (the same word is used in 1 Sam 2, 1 ff. of Anna's sterility). Hence the coming of the Spirit on Mary is a case of God's encounter with his poor, of the divine power working on what the world counts as weakness. The value of Mary's virginity, therefore, is analogous to that of the death of Jesus; her humiliation gains its significance from that of calvary (cf Phil 2, 7). Both in themselves would be wretchedness without the life-giving power of the Spirit.

No doubt there is a particular need for balance in transposing this into terms of actual living. Celibacy is both death and newness of life; to insist one-sidedly on the negative aspect as though the celibate life were sheer, unremitting plod would not accord with the general tone adopted by most authors who write from within the experience of religious life itself. Again, it does not take us far enough to talk about celibacy as 'martyrdom'. The term can carry overtones that positively exclude the joyous lowliness that marks the *magnificat*. Nevertheless, there is often an element of self-deception in the easy claim that celibacy brings so much happiness and satisfaction in the spiritual order that the ache and emptiness inherent in its renunciation are simply dissolved. This is the point of Charles Davis' well-known article in 1966, 'Empty and Poor for Christ'.² For Davis the starting point for a true understanding of celibacy can only be that it is a serious privation, and to talk about substitutes is simply unrealistic. 'To refer to apostolic work as a more universal love is not the point. A mother is no substitute for a wife, nor a wife for children'. Celibacy is a privation and its meaning must be sought in its relation to the 'tragic element of life'. 'Human life is tragic and human fulfilment, except in a superficial sense, a constant hope not an achievement'. Celibacy, then, if it is lived without compromise and if its meaning is not obscured almost beyond recognition by the refusal of poverty, proclaims the christian message that privation, suffering and death are ultimately meaningful.

Spiritual motherhood

The tragic element in celibacy should not be played down, but it needs to be complemented by another consideration. If celibacy is a privation, it is also by its nature productive. As Egenter remarks, ranged 'around the central motive we may discern a wide spectrum of motivations, the two extremes of which we may describe as the virginity of partnership and the virginity of ministry'.³ A proper understanding of the virginity of ministry should not be confused with the pragmatic idea of availability as an 'argument for celibacy'.

¹ Legrand *op. cit.*, pp 125 ff.

² Davis, C.: 'Empty and Poor for Christ', in *America* (no 115, October 8, 1966). Davis re-affirms his conviction that celibacy, understood in these terms, is a meaningful vocation in *A Question of Conscience* (London, 1967), p 30.

³ *Celibacy and Virginity*, p 90.

While valid as far as it goes, this amounts to little more than saying that the celibate has more time for the job. The more profound point is rather that virginity is outgoing, referred to other people precisely because it is the union of the person with Christ, and because a person united with Christ is more and not less truly human. This means among other things that in the case of women union with Christ neither suppresses nor involves the frustration of the instinct of motherhood.

This idea is explored in detail by Fr Dubay in an article 'Virginal Motherhood'.¹ His argument is an elaboration of Pius XII's principle that every woman has been created by God to be a mother either naturally or supernaturally. Those who come to Christ are born anew, and 'since God shares his paternity with the rational creature, men and women can enjoy a new parenthood in the incarnational economy'.² Although spiritual motherhood over men is attributed in the gospels only to Mary (Jn 19, 26-7), Dubay argues from the relationship of the virgin to Christ, through whom it is given to human beings to beget spiritually. This is worked out in terms both of the wholly invisible fruitfulness of prayer and suffering and also in terms of the need for nuns actually to behave in their dealings with people in a way that corresponds to their role and their opportunities. As Pius XII reminded an international congress of teaching sisters, 'many teaching and nursing sisters are nearer to life than the average person in the world'.³

Celibacy and marriage

Many authors show a marked distaste for the language of superiority in which it was once common for religious to distinguish their condition from that of the married. A typical comment is that of J. Bunnik, 'It is a waste of time and energy and a very great danger to christian charity to ask which of the two, marriage or celibacy, is the higher or better way'.⁴ Nevertheless, it is impossible for the celibate not to adopt a position with regard to marriage which makes sense of his decision to give it up.

Two broad lines of approach to this question may be distinguished. The first is an attempt to reconcile with a contemporary, non-manichean notion of marriage the view that celibacy is still the higher way precisely because it entails abstinence from the carnal element in sexual love. The line of argument may be illustrated by the following passage from Galot:

Intimate contact with Christ's flesh calls for the greatest purity on the part of the priest. This consideration is found frequently in tradition.

¹ Dubay, Thomas, S. M.: 'Virginal Motherhood', in *Review for Religious*, vol 24, September 1965.

² *Ibid.*, p 747.

³ Pius XII, *Allocution to the International Congress of Teaching Sisters* (Sept. 13, 1951), cf *The Catholic Mind*, June 1952, p 378.

⁴ Bunnik, R.: 'The Theology of Celibacy', in *Celibacy: the necessary Option*, ed. Frein, George H. (New York, 1968), p 77.

It sometimes assumes a form which appears excessive to us today by placing undue emphasis on the unworthiness which stems from all that is carnal; or it may be implied that some stain goes with the legitimate use of marriage. Still, the traditional argument when purified of scorn of the flesh, is not devoid of value. We can understand that the celebration of Mass calls for the special attention to holiness and chastity on the part of the celebrant.¹

If this is not self-contradictory it must be taken to mean that while many of the arguments on which the traditional view reposes are now inadmissible, the attitude behind them remains sound. This point is made explicitly by Ida Görres, who distinguishes between false doctrines that are easily refuted on the intellectual plane and a 'deeper intuition', an 'experience common to mankind', that we never quite manage to argue ourselves out of. If given free rein, this may produce the sexual phobia typified in Graham Greene's *Pinkie*, and Ida Görres is quite clear that this has no affinity whatever with religious celibacy. Nevertheless, when we have purified our misgivings both of stupidity and superstition, a residue always remains:

When we are really interwoven with nature we feel that precisely at the point of nature which reaches more than any other higher up and deeper down into the numinous, something has gone wrong. Something – we cannot presume to say exactly what – is no longer as it could be, or perhaps as it should be. In other words that sex, while retaining much of its original glory, is somehow uniquely affected by original sin.²

No doubt many priests and religious would agree with this. Others would take the view of Jean Paul Audet that such an attitude is spiritual archaism.³ Perhaps the basic difficulty about this first approach is that the celibate himself is ill-equipped to pronounce on the matter one way or the other. There are of course priests whose unqualified enthusiasm about sex and marriage is quite as much the product of celibate experience as was the older and more austere approach. (They are the ones who see in marriage the infallible solvent of any sexual problems that the unmarried priest might experience.) On the other hand the unmarried have every reason to feel distrustful towards a pessimism which is not based on actual experience of married life. It is worth remembering that for C. S. Lewis, whose book *Four Loves* is anything but simpliste, the celibate theologian simply misses the point when he declares the carnal element in marriage an obstacle to the love of God. For Lewis it is rather 'the gnat-like cloud of petty anxieties and decisions about the conduct of the next hour that have interfered with my prayers more than any passion or appetite whatever. The great permanent

¹ Galot, Jean, S.J.: 'The Priesthood and Celibacy', in *Review for Religious* vol 24, September 1965, p 944.

² Görres, *op. cit.*, p 29.

³ Audet, Jean-Paul: *Structures of Christian Priesthood* (London, 1967), p 174.

temptation of marriage is not to sensuality but (quite bluntly) to avarice'.¹ The second approach is more comprehensive. It does not consider marriage and celibacy simply in terms of the distinction between a life which contains physical sex and one which does not, but it takes each in its totality as a mode of experience and as a sign.

As a sign, marriage is limited by being itself a secular reality. It makes complete sense by secular norms alone, and therefore 'the grace of God can only be visible in a veiled manner'. The marriage of unbelievers can look the same as that of christians. The reference to the kingdom of God cannot be its specifying characteristic.² And as an experience, marriage is centred upon present reality. In it God is known mediately through another person in a relationship which must ultimately yield to another. The danger that besets the married is that 'the relationship becomes an end in itself, so that like all idols it can only in the end bring disappointment to its worshippers'.³

Celibacy, on the other hand, because of the religious value which alone accounts for it, 'expresses outwardly and visibly the present existence of the kingdom in power. The end of the journey is explicitly contained even in its initial steps, whereas in marriage the end is implicit only'.⁴ Or, as Schillebeeckx puts it, celibacy 'reveals the heart of religious values, that only in self-transcendence does the grace of the kingdom of God come to us'.

Celibacy is not to be understood, then, as standing for a value absent from marriage. It is to be understood as a clear sign of that transcendent reference which is present in christian marriage, too, and which must not be lost if marriage is to retain its meaning. It is a value basic to marriage that the relationship be directed beyond itself, and in married life, as in celibacy, 'grace reaches objective expression'.⁵ But only celibacy can signify unambiguously the ultimate reference of all love. The point is illustrated by the following passage, again from Rosemary Haughton:

Without the explicitness of the celibate renunciation it would be hard to see that human love could possibly need to renounce itself in any way. It is so good an image, as St Paul himself acknowledged, that it is likely to claim too much. Yet it is a matter of common experience

¹ Lewis, C. S.: *The Four Loves* (London, 1960), p 90.

² Schillebeeckx, *op. cit.*, p 106.

³ Haughton, Rosemary, in *Celibacy and Virginity*, p 10.

⁴ Haughton, *loc. cit.*

⁵ Schillebeeckx, *op. cit.*, p 106.

It is worth noting in this connection that modern writers tend to adopt a more open view than was common in the past with regard to the question whether marriage necessarily closes the door on certain areas of religious experience. Sikora merely suggests that a 'marriage between "mystics" would have to be less in itself than it would be if it were itself a "love unto folly" between the partners themselves' (*op. cit.*, p. 15). In the extremely valuable French symposium *Mystique et continence*, Eugène Tesson S.J. states the view that there is nothing to prevent a married person from having a similar spiritual vocation to that of a religious; for example, sharing in Christ's solitary agony. Cf *Mystique et Continence* (Paris, 1952), p 370.

that the happiest and most 'fulfilled' marriages are those in which husband and wife are turned 'outwards' to their children, to the world, in all kinds of ways, so that the relationship is the source and beginning of christian living, but not its boundary. The necessary and fruitful absorption of early days has to give way to an openness to life, if the relationship itself is not to grow decadent and artificial. This normal and recognized fact is an indication at the most basic level of the self-transcending direction of a sexual relationship that develops properly. The celibate vocation tries to live this transcendence, not by denying humanity (which means sexuality) but by looking to its perfection, a perfection which lies across the gulf of darkness and denial.¹

Such a view of the matter gives ample meaning to the distinction between the two states of life, while bearing no trace of the suggestion that the difference is one of degrees of purity.

Celibacy and Priesthood

What has been said so far holds true of the celibacy of the secular priesthood as well. Since priestly celibacy is for the kingdom, it is not to be defended primarily in terms of the demands of the ministry or the need for availability. These considerations have their place, but as one secular priest has remarked, 'They find their meaning and focus in the light of this totally dedicated, all-renouncing love between the priest and the person of Jesus'.² The traditional motives, says Fr Plé, are seriously lacking in credit and force, and the future belongs to the new motives which are also the oldest, those formulated by Christ and by St Paul.³

The celibacy debate however turns less on the nature of celibacy itself than on the connection between celibacy and priesthood. The following pages will attempt to summarize the two views of the question. But before doing so it will be well to note that the two sides are not entirely homogeneous. Not all those who propose arguments in favour of clerical celibacy wish to rule out the possibility of married men becoming priests. Although the whole thrust of Schillebeeckx's book is in support of mandatory celibacy, he concludes that 'it would make sense to admit married persons to the priesthood'.⁴ On the other hand, authors who oppose the present legislation often show a high regard for celibacy as a free option. The distinction we shall draw here, then, is between those who consider celibacy to be so related to the priesthood as to be the normal mode of living it, and those who do not.

The argument for clerical celibacy might be described as the argument

¹ Haughton, Rosemary: *Celibacy and Virginity*, p 11.

² O'Neill, David P.: *Priestly Celibacy and Maturity* (New York, 1965), p 35.

³ Plé, Albert, O.P.: 'Celibacy and the Emotional Life', in *Clergy Review* vol LV, no 1, January 1970.

⁴ Schillebeeckx *op. cit.*, p 133.

from affinity. There is no absolute connection between celibacy and priesthood, but it is possible to speak of a bond of suitability. This is an 'essential' bond, since celibacy conforms to the very nature of the priesthood, but it is a bond of conformity, not an absolute bond.¹ To show this, it is therefore necessary to talk about celibacy and priesthood in a manner which brings out the affinity between the two.

The problem is approached on two levels. The first might be called the level of existence. The appeal is to the lived experience of celibacy and the priesthood rather than to abstract ideas. No one has written more compellingly about the lived experience of priestly celibacy than Karl Rahner in his *Open Letter on Celibacy*.² Celibacy for Rahner is before anything else the arduous, challenging, enriching experience of a life which contains more than routine or sex but includes also 'response, mystery, acceptance of pain and renunciation'. Rahner has nothing to say here to the priest who does not want to understand what he is saying, and he clearly implies that those who make the effort to understand will discover the values he is talking about implicit in their own experience of faith in the concrete life-situation of the priesthood. The letter is not in the strict sense an argument for celibacy. Rahner is not offering 'a fussy ascetical commentary on the doctrine of the Vatican decree'. Arguments exist for the affinity between the priesthood and celibacy, and it is possible to treat of them through theological categories. But in the final analysis the case does not claim to be persuasive without the sort of value for which there can be no complete rational justification. Rahner's letter is concerned solely with this preliminary value which the argument as such pre-supposes. The rest of the case needs to be seen in this light. We have already passed in review some of the ways in which it is possible to analyse the motives of celibacy and its effects on the individual himself and on the community. These are summarized by the conciliar decree as a special consecration giving an undivided heart, as responsibility to serve, as spiritual paternity, as a link with the virginal Church and as an eschatological sign. Essentially, the argument is that an analysis of the priesthood shows that these characteristics of celibacy bear a close affinity to those of the priestly state.

The aspects of the priesthood which serve to establish this affinity include the following. The priest is a mediator. 'He must be where he has to lead; united with God in supernatural love, in so far as that is possible on earth'.³ Having power over the eucharistic body of Christ, 'will he not be a priest in a more perfect sense, more exactly represent our Lord if, along with Christ, he makes himself a victim of the total dedication of himself to his heavenly

¹ Galot *op. cit.*, p 950.

² Rahner, K., S.J.: 'The Celibacy of the Secular Priest Today; an Open Letter', in *Servants of the Lord* (London, 1967).

³ Bertrams, Wilhelm: *The Celibacy of the Priest* (Dublin, 1962), p 36.

Father? The sacrifice of the Mass commits the priest to a total offering, to an immolation of his entire person'.¹

A parallel is developed between the objective character of the priest and the consecration of celibacy. Thus, the priest's role, says Auer, is 'to make present and visible on earth the incarnate God and his salvific works, through signifying and representing Christ the mediator'. In the priesthood Christ appears as in a living image.² 'The character, the *sphraghis*, is a sign of ownership: the sacerdotal character completes the process of making a human person the property of God. It fulfils the consecration previously accomplished by baptism and confirmation and extends it to its very limits. By virtue of priestly ordination a man belongs completely to God; Christ claims the entire existence of and all the forces of this man for his divine and exclusive service'.³ Again, the priesthood is a sharing in the virginal priesthood of Christ. 'If the authentic features of Christ's countenance are to stand in sharp relief on the priest's face it is fitting that the latter adopt the ideal of perfect chastity assumed by the Son of God made man'.⁴

Not all those who write on the celibate priesthood adopt the slightly flamboyant style characteristic of these passages. They may serve, however, to illustrate a fundamental point: that belief in celibacy as intrinsically suitable for the priesthood implies a certain idea of what the priesthood is. It is an idea which does not go unchallenged today either on the grounds of history or of present pastoral needs. But it is understandable that so long as the principle is admitted that the priesthood is not just an office, but a state, the basis of a distinctive 'priestly' spirituality, then the link between sacred orders and celibacy is arguably a strong one.

It is held by the advocates of celibacy to be strong enough to withstand objections which no one pretends are frivolous. To the objection that celibacy is difficult, the decree on the priesthood simply replies that priests must make use of supernatural and natural helps and pray for the grace of fidelity. This, argues Lécuyer, is not a theological sleight of hand; there is reasoning behind it. In the view of the council fathers, 'celibacy is so appropriate to the priesthood of the new covenant and so consonant with Christ's priesthood that God will not deny to those whom he calls to the priesthood this other grace also'.⁵

A still more serious problem is the shortage of priests. Schillebeeckx's answer to it is basically that 'to the extent to which the whole people of God are becoming actively aware of their christian duties the need for priests also decreases'.⁶ This solution would surely be facile except in the context of a belief that the priesthood, being more than an office, is normally enabled to be fully itself only through the celibacy to which it has a natural affinity.

¹ *Ibid.*, p 39.

³ Galot *op. cit.*, p 942.

⁵ *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol 4, p 287.

⁶ Schillebeeckx *op. cit.*, p 219.

² Auer, *op. cit.*, p 304.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 942.

The objection that clerical celibacy was a post-apostolic development in the Church, conditioned by adventitious cultural elements and seldom without opposition, is met with a conviction not arising from historical research alone, that whatever the false turnings, the overall progress of the ideal is an instance of the gradual emergence and articulation of a conviction of faith.¹

Finally, the celibacy law itself is defended in terms of the existential inability to do otherwise, assumed to correspond to the priestly vocation. The law, says Schillebeeckx, is the juridical formulation of the inner logic of a particular religious experience.² The experience is the starting point, but for someone in whom the experience is weak, if it exists at all, it still makes sense to accept the law as understood in these terms. For between the experience and the law there is a dialectical tension, which Schillebeeckx explains by analogy with the practice of fasting. Religious fasting originates in the experience of loss of appetite as concomitant to emotion. By voluntary fasting therefore 'we express a longing for the true actual experience'. Similarly, by accepting the law of celibacy a person gives evidence of his desire 'to enter in a special way into the realm of grace from which that celibacy intrinsically arises'.³

To turn now to the other side of the question. It is only fair to say that the criticism passed by the advocates of celibacy on the other side are not altogether unfounded. It is of course difficult to conduct a dialogue with those whose basic position is that if you are honest with yourself you will discover in your own experience the values you are being asked to accept. Nevertheless a purely pragmatic answer is no answer at all to the sort of case made by Rahner. Still, there is an important, if obvious distinction to be drawn between the case against celibacy as presented in its most well known form, that is, through the self disclosures which ex-priests get commissioned to make in periodicals, and the reasoned case based on pastoral and theological grounds by a writer like Jean Paul Audet. This may be divided into main lines of approach. The first concerns the value of celibacy in itself. The second, and more fundamental difference is with the traditional idea of the priesthood as such.

The difficulties in observing mandatory celibacy, though an important element in the case against it, is not on the whole the main argument. The dutch symposium 'Priests who go'⁴ analyses fifty-two dossiers of priests whose final reason for leaving was the desire to marry. A large number of these left because, quite apart from wanting to marry, they found no satisfaction in their priesthood for reasons connected with doctrine or difficulties with authority. Again, it should be noted that insistence on the pitfalls of celibacy is found more or less equally on both sides of the debate.

Another feature of the attack on celibacy is the concern to reduce to size

¹ *Ibid.*, p 3.

² *Ibid.*, pp 122 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, p 125.

⁴ Quant, Willemien; Scheepers H; Meijers L.; Trimbos C. J.: *The Priests who Go* (London, 1969), Ch 1.

what are seen as the more extravagant claims made for it on the score of pastoral effectiveness. The symposium edited by G. Frein, *Celibacy: the Necessary Option*, includes an article by an anglican who, while not maintaining that the case against celibacy is 'obvious or overwhelming',¹ interprets the anglican experience as showing that the faithful, once they get used to the idea, 'show a marked preference for a married clergy'. It is suggested that the favour accorded to the celibate clergy by married catholics may betoken a less healthy understanding of the matter than is sometimes supposed. In the view of another writer in the same volume, there are still many people who regard marriage as little more than tolerated sin, and 'we might ask if people in this frame of mind want unmarried priests because they themselves feel more or less guilty and need some kind of alibi, exemplary christians with a high rank in the ecclesiastical community, who perform what they themselves cannot perform'.²

The direct attack on celibacy is perhaps most effective when it is aimed at the shortage of priests. The issue is not always seen merely in terms of quantity. For one theologian, the point is whether, numbers apart, the present discipline can attract the best young men for the apostolate.³ However, the argument based on sheer numerical shortage is a dominant one. No doubt there would be some agreement with the writer in *Herder Correspondence* who considers that at least with regard to countries like latin America and Africa the argument from shortage of priests, as put by Adrian Hastings in *Church and Mission in modern Africa*, is 'virtually unanswerable'.⁴

The theological big guns of the opponents of celibacy are reserved, however, for the second line of attack. The argument for mandatory celibacy supposes, as we have seen, not only an appreciation of celibacy as a value, but also an idea of the priesthood as such that celibacy can be shown to be suitable to it. But, as Bunnik remarks, the weakness of the affinity argument is that we can no longer say what the ministry is.⁵ The traditional case takes a view of the priesthood which is regarded in some quarters as at best one of a number of theological options. It is no longer taken for granted that the priesthood should be regarded as a state of life as well as a function. Blenkinsop writes in this connection:

The tension between a state of life and a pastoral and ministerial function has never been successfully resolved and is today more acute than ever. Monastic orders have been declericalized and are asking with increasing insistence why monks have to be priests; the secular clergy have been monasticized and are asking with increasing in-

¹ Casserley, J. V. C.: 'Clerical Marriage in Anglican Experience', in *Celibacy: the Necessary Option*, pp 87-101.

² Bunnik *op. cit.*, p 305.

³ Riga, P.: 'A critical study of *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*', in *Married Priests and Married Nuns*, ed. Colaizzi, James. F., (London, 1969), p 85.

⁴ 'Must Celibacy be Compulsory?' in *Herder Correspondence*, vol 5, no 3, March 1968. Hastings, Adrian: *Church and Mission in Modern Africa* (London, 1967).

⁵ *Celibacy: the Necessary Option*, p 85.

sistence why they have to be monks. And behind both questions there is the underlying doubt whether the ministry has to be considered as a state of life at all.¹

For Jean Paul Audet the doubt is already resolved. The early christians were concerned with styles of life whose main lines were determined by the various functions that developed, rather than with states of life dictated from above and fixed once for all by a hierarchy of degrees of perfection in man's relationship with God and with his neighbour. For Audet it is the model of the early family-based communities that have more relevance to our own time than the structures which have evolved subsequently in the Church, and accordingly, the more primitive functional idea of the ministry that is more relevant today, than the idea which forms the basis of the affinity argument. There is no room today for the historically determined notion of the sacral priest.²

The calling in question of the latter idea is backed up by a particular interpretation of the history of the celibate priesthood, which is seen as the essentially retrograde introduction into christianity of the aaronic priesthood, coupled with a sexual dualism of largely pagan origin, and bolstered up by a tendentious interpretation of certain scriptural texts. 'As early as the second century', writes Blenkinsopp, 'we find the monarchic episcopate emerging clearly, and not long after that the beginnings of a process by which the whole cultic apparatus of judaism was reintroduced'.³ On the interpretation of history Blenkinsopp therefore parts company with Schillebeeckx:

'Schillebeeckx himself refers to certain pagan motives conscripted by church writers in defence of clerical celibacy which, never more than partial, was imposed in the face of considerable resistance. He does not, however, in my view, give sufficient weight to what was, historically, the strongest force working for the legal enforcement of a celibate clergy, namely, a process of re-sacralization greatly aided by hermeneutically unsound use of the Old Testament'.⁴

Auer remarks that the celibacy debate will always go on, since there is no absolutely conclusive argument for celibacy. Today the debate is particularly, indeed tragically, acute. The breakdown of communication can be traced basically to two causes. First, there is undoubtedly a very marked difference of religious attitude between the two sides. The exponents of celibacy dissociate themselves from false motivation of the past, but over much of their writing hovers a clear prejudice against sex. And it is not unfair to say that much of the writing on the other side breathes an atmosphere of secularism. These are differences of outlook; and it would be too simple to say that there is not on either side a perception of human frailty

¹ Blenkinsopp, *op. cit.*, p 48.

² Audet, *op. cit.*, pp 108 ff.

³ Blenkinsopp, *op. cit.*, p 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 42.

that the other overlooks. More fundamental, however, is the rift between two views on the traditional conception of the priesthood, on which the affinity argument ultimately reposes.

The celibate life

The question of compulsion apart, there is abundant testimony today to the psychological feasibility of celibacy. Three years ago, the *Catholic World* carried an article by a psychologist, J. Rosenbaum, who describes himself as 'not religious'.¹ In fact, he goes further than many religious on celibacy in sweeping away psychological objections. Dr Rosenbaum's point is that celibacy no longer presents the same psychological problem that it put before the earlier school of analysts, for whom sexual abstinence meant repression and therefore neurosis. He compares religious with artists and scientists as instances of the 'creative mind'. And one of the peculiarities of the creative mind is that it is capable of transforming large quantities of basic sexual and aggressive energy into works of service. 'The celibate expresses his basic human and instinctual heritage in works of good both for God and man and, if he is successful, he actually undoes and over-rides the usual mechanism of repression'.

The rub of course is the proviso 'if he is successful'. Certainly, there is a marked awareness today not only of the obvious dangers of which religious have always been conscious, but of the more devious ways in which a repressed sexuality can recoil upon the religious personality. Trimbos remarks that it is a characteristic of our time that we find the idea of illness particularly repugnant, and he accounts for many defections from the priesthood and religious life on the grounds that mental sickness is a price that many people are unwilling to pay for fidelity to a past choice.² There is little doubt that warnings that the more far-sighted³ have been making for some time are now being taken seriously: the danger of admitting to religious life a boy or girl who does not think of himself as psychologically fit for marriage;⁴ the possibility of a basically erotic love for God;⁵ the special danger for the celibate of neurotic aggressiveness. The following testimony of a depth psychologist quoted by Häring might once have been scandalous; today's reader is more likely to find it sadly obvious:

First he said that among the most wonderful and mature people he

¹ Rosenbaum, Jean, B., M.D.: 'A Psychoanalyst's Case for Celibacy', in *Catholic World*, May 1967. A valuable Catholic study of celibacy from a psychological viewpoint is Oraison, M., O.P.: *Celibacy* (London, 1967).

² Trimbos, C. J.: 'The Law of Celibacy in a Changing World', in *The Priests who Go*, p 106.

³ A study of celibacy which is still to be recommended is the symposium *Chastity*, the fifth volume of the *Religious Life* series (*Blackfriars publications*, London, 1955).

⁴ Cf Rousset, Suzy: 'Psychological Aspects of Chastity', in the above symposium, p 165.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 167.

had ever met in his life as a doctor and analyst were priests, but he also conceded that some priests had probably sublimated their sexuality one hundred per cent into aggressiveness. Perhaps these men would not experience any temptations against chastity, yet they were not witnesses to celibacy for the kingdom.¹

For the celibate, the basic problem is that nothing can alter the fact that he lives in a 'profound emotional deprivation'.² In a valuable article in the *Clergy Review*, Fr Plé O. P. defines celibacy as a 'fast of the affections', and it would be unnatural if fasting did not sometimes produce hunger. Celibacy therefore requires education, affective prayer and the support of a particular life-style.³ This last needs to include relationships which are in some sense affective.

The problem of personal relationships is widely discussed in current writing on religious life. Perhaps the first thing that needs to be noticed is a marked diversity in the way people talk about it. Some give evidence of a reserve which is strikingly absent in other quarters. One writer puts the basic principle as follows: 'The God-alone notion of religious chastity implies nothing less than the complete renunciation of all purely natural human affections'. He concludes from this that 'a religious bound by a vow of chastity is permitted to display only that specific type of human affection which we are pleased to term 'religious'. This is a unique affection which stands midway between a thoroughly worldly human affection devoid of grace and a purely divine affection'.⁴

What this means in terms of actual behaviour is anyone's guess. The phrase 'worldly human affection devoid of grace' is hardly illuminating. What is clear however is the concern that even in his personal relationships the religious remains one whose life is dedicated to a particular personal relationship with God in the mystery and loneliness that this entails. Fr Örsy gives evidence of the same concern when he says of young religious that 'too much human fulfilment while the gift of virginity is taking root may cut short a developing special friendship with God'.⁵

Perhaps this sort of consideration might be read as a commentary on, rather than a criticism of, the approach which is more directly concerned with inter-personal relationships. For it remains true, as Fr Sikora remarks, that the celibate, like anyone else, comes to know God 'through the analogical resemblance of his creatures to him, and we understand the meaning of inter-personal love and communion with God through our understanding of human love and communion'.⁶

The discussion on personal relationships may be divided into two areas. The first concerns relationships in which the difference of sex is not the

¹ Häring, B.: *Acting on the Word* (New York, 1968), p 45.

² Plé *op. cit.*, p 34.

³ *Ibid.*, p 40.

⁴ Dyer, Ralph, D., S.M.: *The New Religious* (Milwaukee, 1967), pp 39 ff.

⁵ *Open to the Spirit*, p 91.

⁶ Sikora *loc. cit.*, p 6.

prime consideration, and those which are in the broad sense sexual. On the first point, it is widely conceded that neither personal fulfilment nor 'witness' were well served in the past by the extreme caution that surrounded the question of 'particular friendships'. Positive harm, says Häring, was done in the past by the morbid insistence in novitiates and seminaries on the dangers of such friendships.¹ Equally morbid, of course, was the feeling that religious should not show too much affection towards patients or children under their charge. It is the merit of Fr Dubay's article, already mentioned in this survey, that it provides a theological basis for ordinary human affection in the religious, precisely as a religious.²

It is in the matter of relationships between the sexes that affection can still be seen as a problem. That such relationships are necessary is generally admitted, since for the celibate, as for others, maturity involves self-understanding 'precisely as masculine or feminine and therefore as naturally related to their complement'. 'What is needed is a real understanding of the proper psychological mystery of the other sex as well as of one's own. . . . Without such understanding one is less a man or less a woman'.³

Human relationships do not lend themselves to blueprint presentation, and it would be futile to look for more than general principles on the subject in the literature on religious life. This survey may conclude with the mention of three such principles. First, that there is a need for some sort of feminine presence in the life of the seminarian. It may be provided in a sensibly run university-seminary situation,⁴ and also through the presence of women in the seminary itself.⁵ The second principle is that whereas it has long been recognized that a breakdown in communication has existed between priest

¹ Häring *op. cit.*, p 142.

² Dubay *op. cit.*, p 754.

³ Sikora *op. cit.*, p 18.

Perhaps the most radical approach in english writing to the question of relationships between celibates of opposite sex is to be found in Moran and Harris, *Experiences in Community*. The general tenour of their chapter on celibacy is fairly clear. The role of the celibate community, as a 'social charismatic', is to act as a corrective against discrimination of any sort, and particularly against the discrimination 'which puts one half of the human race subservient to the other half'. A characteristic of the whole of this book is that its practical implications remain out of focus. That the celibate enjoys a unique opportunity to treat women as equals and to be seen to prefer a 'wider range of relational possibilities' to an 'obsessive concern with sex' is a valuable insight. But the sort of relationship that the authors have in mind is evidently a radical departure from existing community patterns. What they envisage is some form of mixed community. The difficulty - as the authors are well aware - lies in the risks involved and the scepticism of certain psychologists about the possibility of the style of relationship they propose. This is also the reason why, in a general survey of current literature on celibacy, this project seems best treated in a footnote.

⁴ Cf Poole, Stafford: *Seminary in Crisis* (New York, 1965), ch 5: 'The Faculty and the Environment'.

⁵ Cf Hagmaier, George, C. S. P. and Kennedy, Eugene, C. M.: 'Psychological Aspects of Seminary Life', in *Seminary Education in a time of change* (Indiana, 1965).

and people and within religious communities themselves, we still need to realize that an equally serious breakdown exists between priests and nuns.¹ Thirdly, that a celibate who is more or less at ease in his celibacy and capable of not being engrossed or infatuated may find enrichment in a relationship which is 'sexual though not sexually active'.²

Those who propose such principles are of course aware of the pitfalls that await the naive, the ill-informed or the psychologically unstable.³ No one questions the need for self-knowledge and restraint. It is impossible to wade through the literature on the 'celibacy debate' without being made aware that celibacy contains no easy antidote to human weakness. What is clear, however, is that the celibate's choice to love God 'unto folly', if he really lives it out, makes a profound difference in the realm of his personal relationships both with men and women, and the difference it makes is to enhance not to destroy. Perhaps no one has expressed more succinctly what the modern writers are trying to say, than Francis de Sales in a letter to the Baroness de Chantal:

... this, then, is the bond that unites us, these are the ties that hold us together, and the closer they draw us, the more ease and freedom they will give us. Know, then, that I hold myself closely bound to you, and seek to know no more, save that this bond is incompatible with no other, whether of vow or of marriage.⁴

Michael Ivens S.J.

¹ Cf Sister Consolata, V.S.: 'Concerning Virgins', in *New Blackfriars*, vol 47, no. 554, July 1966.

² Plé *op. cit.*, p 43.

³ A valuable discussion of the problem of transference and counter-transference in the counselling relationship is O'Toole, Thomas: 'A Possible Insight into the Celibate Counselling Situation', in *Review for Religious* vol 29, no 2, March 1970. The subject of relations between priests and women is treated with the right blend of humour and earnestness by Ida Görres, *op. cit.*, p 83.

⁴ François de Sales: *Oeuvres Complètes*, Tome XII, p 285. Quoted by Plé, *op. cit.*, p 42.