

THE POSITIVE VALUES OF CONSECRATED CELIBACY

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CELIBACY CONSIDERED simply as the social condition of the unmarried has of itself no positive value, it is neutral. One may be celibate from necessity, or for reasons that have nothing to do with religion or christianity. 'Consecrated celibacy', on the other hand, generally refers to a form of life freely and definitively chosen for apostolic, ascetical or mystical reasons, and as such duly ratified and accepted by religious superiors. This article has primarily in view therefore the value of celibacy as chosen and lived within the framework of religious life. Yet most of what I shall say applies equally well to any form of 'consecrated celibacy', since I shall mainly expose the foundations of this celibacy as they appear in the New Testament from a time when the practice of celibacy had not yet taken definite forms.¹

For the sake of the Kingdom

Answering various questions which had apparently been put to him, St Paul recommends that as a general rule every one should retain the state in life he had when he embraced the christian faith. He states, however, that dedicated celibacy is preferable to marriage, being spiritually more advantageous.² Those incapable of absolute continence are advised to marry: 'For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion'.³ All this he classifies as apostolic advice, and not as a commandment of the Lord on which he explicitly founds only what concerns the indissolubility of marriage.⁴

Turning now to the teaching of the Lord himself as it is known from the synoptic gospels, we effectively find attributed to Jesus the prohibition of divorce with remarriage in the clearest terms: 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery with her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another,

¹ Several good studies have positively contributed to the present debate on celibacy. Those of Durrwell, Legrand, Schillebeekx have been particularly useful to me. These and others will be more specifically mentioned below.

² 1 Cor 7.

³ 1 Cor 7, 9.

⁴ 1 Cor 7, 10-11.

she commits adultery'.¹ This doctrine, Jesus explains, simply reinstates what the original monogamous marriage was and enforces its observance, now that the time of exception is over.² According to Matthew the disciples raised an objection, which is probably the evangelist's way of joining to the pericope a saying of the Lord which may not have been originally pronounced in this circumstance. They said: 'If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry'. He answered: 'Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it'.³

There are exegetes, even today, who understand Mt 19, 12 as meaning: 'To make oneself voluntarily similar to a eunuch is better than to commit adultery which would exclude the sinner from the kingdom of heaven'.⁴ Quesnell finds this interpretation confirmed in Eph 5, 22-31, where monogamous marriage, 'two into one flesh' (Gen 2, 24), is understood as manifesting the central mystery of Christ and of his Church: by being 'the saviour of his wife', by 'loving her', the man with his wife 'makes the Christ-Church relation visible in this world'.⁵ This great value of monogamous marriage, Quesnell concludes, explains that Christ 'does not retract his hard saying' but accentuates the husband's duty: 'To continue this loyal and perfect love, even when the love is not returned, is effectively to make oneself a eunuch, a person incapable of marriage for the rest of one's life'.⁶ This interpretation of Christ's saying in Mt 19, 12 is exegetically possible and can hardly as such be refuted. It does not, however, even if accepted, exclude another, perhaps deeper, meaning which the more traditional interpretation and

¹ Mk 10, 11-12.

² Mk 10, 3-6.

³ Mt 19, 10-12. In my quotations the Revised Standard Version is used.

⁴ Dupont, J.: *Mariage et divorce dans l'évangile, Matthieu 19, 3-12 et parallèles* (Bruges 1959), p 219.

⁵ Quesnell, Q.: 'Made Themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven' (Mt 19, 12), in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968), p 354. The following remark may be apposite here: 'While it is true that Paul sees christian marriage as a sign or symbol of the union between Christ and the Church (Eph 5, 21-33), it needs to be emphasized that this union between Christ and the Church is a "virginal" one (cf 2 Cor 11, 2) and that nowhere in the New Testament is the fruitfulness of the Church related to a marital union between Christ and the Church'. Swain, L.: 'Paul on Celibacy', in *The Clergy Review* 51 (1966), p 791.

⁶ Quesnell, *art. cit.*, p 358.

christian consciousness have read in the text, and which I will now expose and defend in my own way.

The circumstances of Christ's saying, as presented by Matthew, have been given above. According to Quesnell, if the saying of v. 12 is 'a call to celibacy', then the whole line of thought has anomalously shifted from the previous thrust of the passage, entirely devoted to 'the greatness and sanctity before God of the monogamous marriage'. Besides, he adds, we would have the singular case in which Jesus 'agrees with the disciples' objection and begins to teach that it is not advantageous to marry'.¹ It seems to me, however, that the disciples' objection is not confirmed by Christ. It is corrected, or better it redactionally introduces Christ's saying of v. 12, which takes the debate to a broader and higher level: the reappraisal of marriage in the new situation created by the advent of the kingdom of God. The institution of monogamous marriage goes back to the creation of man. It is now restored to its exacting integrity, and the observance of this new legislation should appear easier in the light of what is taking place at the dawn of the messianic age: some choose celibacy as a more adapted form of life, in view of the pattern set by the expected kingdom² which, in fact, according to Matthew, has already come upon us.³ This interpretation becomes even more probable if the saying is polemical in character, originally refuting slanderous suggestions that Christ himself and some of his followers were but eunuchs inapt for procreation.⁴ Other texts show that Christ's adversaries were capable of similar personal invectives.⁵ The message then of Mt 19, 11-12 seems to be: Not all can understand (or 'accept') that the indissoluble monogamous marriage as willed by God can actually involve the necessity of observing continence over a long period. A great example for such understanding and for the practice of continence is set by those who entirely renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. It is clear then that even in this interpretation, 'this precept' or 'this word' (*logos*) in v. 11 refers to v. 9 and not to what follows.⁶

To accept fully the requirements of monogamous marriage as instituted 'from the beginning' (v. 4), one may have to make himself a eunuch, that is, to live like one, since divorce does not allow remar-

¹ Quesnell, *art. cit.*, p 342.

² Cf Mt 22, 30.

³ Mt 12, 28.

⁴ See Blinzler, J.: 'Eisin eunouchoi. Zur Auslegung von Mt 19, 12', in *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 48 (1957), p 268ff.

⁵ See Mt 11, 19.

⁶ As against the opinion of Quesnell, *art. cit.*, p 346ff.

riage as long as the partner is still alive. Although such a statement is true and is clearly implied in v. 12, it does not seem to define primarily those 'who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven'. For here Matthew, as in the context of the parables (ch. 13), has predominantly in mind *the new situation* created by the inbreaking of the kingdom of God in the messianic times. The restoration in its original integrity of monogamous marriage, although important, is not as distinctive a feature of the kingdom as the new phenomenon pointed out by Christ himself: there are some who embrace the state of celibacy for the sake of the kingdom.

The voluntary eunuchs do then for the kingdom what a merchant does in search of fine pearls: finding one of great value, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it; or what a man does when he finds a treasure hidden in a field; in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.¹ The purpose of Christ's saying in Mt 19, 12 is less to issue a call to celibacy than to draw attention to the working of a new religious experience based on the internal logic of the claims of the kingdom: some find that seized by the kingdom they become inapt for conjugal life, because their heart is entirely where their treasure is.² Christ apparently has in mind those among his disciples who like him have opted to stay unmarried or to live as though they were celibate. He does not propose celibacy as an abstract ideal or as a requirement of the kingdom. His words indicate that voluntary celibacy has been from the beginning of the new age an authentic religious phenomenon resulting from the obvious primacy taken by the grace of the kingdom. This experience was due to be thematized and erected in principle as an ideal for all christians, already by Paul himself, and later codified as a rule for clerics.³ In any case, it is imperative for those who choose consecrated celibacy as their form of life to keep always alive in their hearts and minds what pressed upon the first disciples: to follow Christ without reserve⁴ and to devote themselves entirely to the kingdom and its cares.⁵ It may be that the Church, in 'imposing' celibacy on the latin clergy, wishes to set them in a life-pattern that will help generate in the priests of Christ that initial religious experience which spontaneously sprang from the impact of the kingdom. There are in fact good grounds for

¹ Mt 13, 44-45.

² Mt 6, 21.

³ Cf I Cor 7. See Schillebeeckx, E.: *Autour du célibat du prêtre*: tr. du néerlandais par Antoine Freund (Paris, 1967).

⁴ Cf Lk 14, 20.

⁵ Cf Mt 4, 18-22; 13, 22.

asserting that a theological affinity exists between ministry and celibacy.¹

Sons of the Resurrection

The vocation to celibacy or the observance of continence does not depend on human effort alone: they are graces received from above.² For consecrated celibacy belongs also to the pattern of christian redemption. Those who choose this form of life wish to draw the ultimate consequences from their baptism. For it is a fact that redemption takes place in a transformation which moves from the world of the flesh to the world of the spirit,³ just as it does in Christ himself, 'put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit'.⁴ This is not to imply in any way that conjugal relations are sinful 'works of the flesh',⁵ or that married life does not have its spiritual aspects and its own christian value, to be highly esteemed.⁶ But in celibacy the more direct way is taken towards meeting one of the capital demands of christian morality: to sanctify one's body in the holiness of the spirit. It is not simply a question, Paul teaches, of subordinating the body to the spirit, as philosophers can do, or of mortifying the lower instincts, as christian asceticism requires, but of bringing our whole lives in harmony with *the new situation* arisen with the life, death and resurrection of Christ: 'You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead'.⁷ Without even referring to John and his 'realized eschatology',⁸ it is clear that, for the New Testament, in Christ raised from the dead, a new life has begun for all those who belong to him.

Elsewhere Paul is explicit on this subject: 'I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none . . . for the form of this world is passing away'.⁹ This, he also explains, is the consequence of our configuration to Christ in baptism: 'We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life'.¹⁰ For some christians, moved by the Spirit, this newness of

¹ See Schillebeeckx, *op. cit.*, p 139 ff.

² Cf Mt 19, 11.

³ Cf Rom 8, 13.

⁴ 1 Pet 3, 18.

⁵ Gal 5, 19.

⁶ Cf e.g. *Gaudium et Spes* on marriage and the family, 47-52 (*The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Abbott, pp 249-258).

⁷ Col 2, 12.

⁸ Cf Jn 5, 25; 1 Jn 3, 14.

⁹ 1 Cor 7, 29, 31.

¹⁰ Rom 6, 4.

life manifests itself and develops best in the framework of consecrated celibacy. They choose the way of life which is closer to that of the blessed, as our Lord describes it in his controversy with the sadducees: 'The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die any more, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection'.¹ They feel, more than others, the meaning of Paul's words: 'Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling'.² They wish to bear, as far as can be here on earth, 'the image of the man of heaven', knowing well that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God'.³ St Cyprian would tell the christian virgins of his time (3rd century): 'What we are all to become, you have begun to be. The glory of the resurrection in the next life you possess already: you are passing through life without life's contagion. In persevering in chastity and virginity, you are equal to the angels of God'.⁴

Celibacy and the Cross

Consecrated celibacy depends on a decision made once for all, but it has to be daily revived and strengthened in prayer and vigilance. It is neither easy yoke nor light burden,⁵ but a steep climb heavenward. To true celibacy can be justly applied this saying: 'The gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few'.⁶ All three synoptics report the sayings of the Lord on the necessity of detachment.⁷ In this context⁸ and in another one which he has in common with Matthew only, Luke, often an absolutist in matter of gospel requirements, adds 'wife' to the areas covered by christian disengagement: 'If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother *and wife* and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple'.⁹ Of course 'hate' is here a semitic strong word meaning total detachment. Christ does not ask the disciples to dismiss their wives, although Luke's version quite obviously suggests, what Paul taught,¹⁰ that the unmarried should adopt consecrated

¹ Lk 20, 34-36.

² 2 Cor 5, 2.

³ 1 Cor 15, 49 ff.

⁴ Cyprian, *On the dress of Virgins* 22 (or 13), in *Library of the Fathers* (Oxford, 1839), p 129; PL 4, 475.

⁵ Mt 7, 14.

⁷ Mk 10, 28-31 and parallels.

⁶ Mt 11, 30.

⁸ Lk 18, 29.

⁹ Lk 14, 26-27.

¹⁰ 1 Cor 7, 27.

celibacy as the form of life more apt to meet the exigencies of the kingdom. It can be presumed that Luke felt he had to mention explicitly marriage as an area of detachment, since for him, as it seems, perpetual continence was 'one of the most "crucifying" forms of self-denial, one of the most absolute ways of taking on the *nekrosis* of Jesus'.¹ Also Luke's 'daily' cross² may allude to the burden of christian continence, along with other less optional christian requirements.

Following his misguided conscience, Jephthah, one of Israel's 'judges', had resolved to execute on his own daughter the vow he had made to offer in sacrifice the first person he would meet after defeating the ammonites. Informed of that, the girl asked her father to let her go and wander on the mountains 'and bewail my virginity':³ the disgrace, that is, of having to die before being a mother. This illustrates that the Old Testament, as a whole, attached no value to virginity. Christian celibacy, on the other hand, is both a renunciation and a dedication to love more and to love one who is greater, namely Christ, whose love for the Church is compared by Paul to that of a husband for his wife.⁴ In the former economy, when the bridegroom had not yet come, virginity and celibacy would have been abnegation without true dedication.⁵ Those christians who choose celibacy primarily opt for a mode of life more consonant with the kingdom, embracing at the same time the sacrifices which the choice implies.⁶ The attitude of the truly dedicated celibate is that of the man who has found a treasure: 'In his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.'⁷

Signs of the Times

To the pharisees and sadducees who asked a sign from heaven Jesus gives the admonition: 'You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times'.⁸ This probably refers immediately to his own miracles.⁹ Other exceptional happenings accompanied the appearance of the messianic age. Not the least among these must have been the movement towards celibacy.¹⁰ It is possible even today to view celibacy

¹ Legrand, L.: *The Biblical Doctrine of Virginity* (London, 1963), p 67; Cf 2 Cor 4, 10.

² Lk 9, 23.

³ Jg 11, 37.

⁴ Eph 5, 21-33.

⁵ Durrwell, F. X.: *In the Redeeming Christ. Toward a Theology of Spirituality* (New York, 1963) p 175. See his chapter 11 on 'Christian Virginity', pp 169-188.

⁶ Cf Col 1, 24.

⁷ Mt 13, 44.

⁸ Mt 16, 3.

⁹ Cf Mt 11, 5; 15, 31.

¹⁰ Cf Mt 19, 12.

as a form of life with a prophetic value in regard to eschatology. It is senseless to say that we know nothing of the *eschaton*, of the last things. If this were true, we would be at a loss to interpret the present and our own lives, qualified by what is coming. The eschatology of the New Testament may be in part vested in the language and the imagery of later Jewish speculations, but no true believer can set aside the essential content of New Testament eschatology.

Jeremiah may have been the first biblical character to embrace celibacy as a state of life. He did it to obey the word of the Lord, to present his own life as a prophecy of the impending doom, as a sign of the imminent judgement on Israel: 'You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place'.¹ It is legitimate to connect this experience of Jeremiah with Paul's declaration: 'I think that in view of the "impending" distress it is well for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage'.² The Greek word for 'impending' also means 'present', but the context clearly points to the future.³ 'It is because the times we are living in are the times of the end that it is better not to be burdened with matrimonial obligations, so as to be able to give one's undivided attention to God'.⁴ It is often objected that this interpretation makes Paul share the erroneous belief that the end of the world was imminent. Not chronology, however, but theology is here directly involved. For the New Testament writers this is the last period of the world, however long it may be,⁵ and the expectation of the parousia colours the values that belong to it. In Genesis the propagation of the animal species is stressed⁶ and the generations of the patriarchs show how well this divine bidding was observed also by the human race. But other interests are proper to the eschatological times.⁷ Among the preoccupations for which men can remain unprepared for the coming of the Son of man, Jesus listed 'marrying and being given in marriage', as it was in the days of Noah.⁸ Neither is it by chance that 'virgins' are made to represent Christians waiting for Christ: 'Ten virgins took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom'.⁹ Not

¹ Jer 16, 2.

² Cf 1 Cor 7, 29-31.

³ Acts 2, 17; 1 Jn 2, 18; Heb 1, 2.

⁴ See Grundmann, W.: *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament* (Berlin 1968), p 429, on Mt 19, 21. He also refers to Mt 13, 11: 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given'.

⁵ Lk 17, 27; Mt 24, 37, 44.

² 1 Cor 7, 26-27.

⁴ Legrand, *op. cit.*, p 31.

⁶ Gen 1, 22.

⁹ Mt 25, 1.

surprisingly, Paul viewed celibacy as preferable to marriage.¹ Besides, he obviously thought also of the brevity of every one's individual life,² and he wrote: 'My desire is to depart and be with Christ'.³

There is a trend today in favour of prophecy as a remedy against excessive institutionalization. Unfortunately, the true prophets are few and their pronouncements subject to error. There exists, however, a form of prophecy which receives little attention or is misrepresented. It is the prophecy in action, the example of those who modestly live fully according to the kingdom and thus proclaim its presence to a world largely secularized. The dedicated celibates are foremost among these silent witnesses to the Church's expectation of Christ and of the resurrection. They are those who subscribe by their lives to what Isaiah says: 'All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower in the field',⁴ and to what Paul declared: 'The form of this world is passing away'.⁵ They are the silent harbingers of a joyous hope, like lamps shining in a dark place until the day dawns,⁶ until the Lord comes.⁷ Like Paul they are 'straining forward to what lies ahead'⁸ and are the front runners in the race towards salvation, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of the faith.⁹

Spiritual Fecundity

'To multiply the descendants' is the great blessing bestowed upon the patriarchs¹⁰ and fecundity is promised to those who obey God's commandments.¹¹ But Abraham's posterity would also be spiritual, he by whom all the families of the earth will bless themselves.¹² This, Paul explains,¹³ was the working of faith, since through Christ the patriarch's blessing came upon the gentiles themselves.¹⁴ Another type of spiritual fecundity is Jerusalem, mother of nations,¹⁵ especially the messianic Jerusalem,¹⁶ of whom Deutero-Isaiah writes: 'The children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married.'¹⁷ In the New Testament the Virgin Mary is the perfect embodiment of this ideal of spiritual fecundity, not only by her conception from the holy Spirit and the virgin birth,¹⁸

¹ 1 Cor 7, 38.

⁴ Isai 40, 6.

⁷ 1 Cor 11, 26; Phil 4, 5.

¹⁰ Gen 23, 17.

¹³ Rom 4, 16.

¹⁶ Isai 2, 2.

² 2 Cor 4, 17.

⁵ 1 Cor 7, 31.

⁸ Phil 3, 13.

¹¹ Deut 28, 4.

¹⁴ Gal 3, 14, 16.

¹⁷ Isai 54, 1; Gal 4, 26.

³ Phil 1, 23.

⁶ 2 Pet 1, 19.

⁹ Heb 12, 1-12.

¹² Gen 12, 3; 22, 18.

¹⁵ Ps 87.

¹⁸ Mt 1, 18-25.

but also as the mother of the believers in Christ.¹ It is mainly for this grace of her spiritual motherhood, she the true daughter of Sion, that Mary pronounced her *Magnificat* and said: 'He has regarded the low estate of his handmaid. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed'.²

An Old Testament preparation leading to a theology of spiritual fecundity can be seen not only in the description of Abraham as a spiritual ancestor but also in the miraculous birth of Isaac from barren Sarah,³ who becomes mother in the economy of the promise,⁴ having conceived by faith.⁵ The miraculous motherhood of this and of other female ancestresses, like Rebecca,⁶ and Rachel,⁷ as well as of the mother of Samson,⁸ and of Elizabeth,⁹ prepared the revelation of the unique virginal motherhood of Mary, as well as of the motherhood of the Church, 'the Jerusalem above',¹⁰ the heavenly Bride,¹¹ and of the spiritual fecundity of those who choose celibacy for the sake of the kingdom. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, prophesied when she said: 'The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn'.¹² The irregularities which characterize the lineage of Jesus and the mention of four ancestresses, not all of commendable repute, illustrate in Matthew's genealogy how God's ways are unpredictable, how the divine purpose is attained through interventions that may upset accepted human projects and valuations. Of this can be read a precise application in Christ's own words: 'Do not presume to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham'.¹³

Spiritual fecundity is also implied in Christ's saying on the priority in the kingdom of disciple kinship over natural kinship: 'Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother'.¹⁴ Jesus omits 'father' presumably because elsewhere he recommends: 'Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven'.¹⁵ In the perspective of the kingdom, to give physical birth to Jesus himself is a lesser blessing than to hear the word of God and keep it.¹⁶ Elizabeth has praised both Mary's motherhood and the faith which had rendered this possible.¹⁷ Paul

¹ Jn 19, 26-27.

⁴ Rom 9, 9.

⁷ Gen 30, 22.

¹⁰ Gal 4, 26.

¹³ Mt 3, 9.

¹⁶ Lk 11, 27-28.

² Lk 1, 48; Cf Gen 30, 23.

⁵ Heb 11, 11.

⁸ Jg 13, 3.

¹¹ Apoc 22, 17.

¹⁴ Mt 12, 50.

¹⁷ Lk 1, 42-45.

³ Gen 11, 31.

⁶ Gen 25, 2.

⁹ Lk 1, 36.

¹² 1 Sam 2, 5.

¹⁵ Mt 23, 9.

takes pride in his own spiritual fecundity when he writes: 'I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel'.¹ In fact, it is God himself, the Father of lights, who 'of his own will brought us forth by the word of truth'.²

Conclusion

Impelled by the kingdom, some of its first witnesses spontaneously chose celibacy as the form of life more adapted to its exigencies. This authentic religious experience followed in fact the pattern of sanctification to which every christian is called by virtue of his baptism. Like Christ himself who found redemption and secured it³ by passing through his sacrifice from a state in the flesh to one in the spirit,⁴ christians try to live now according to what they hope to be, 'sons of the resurrection'. Following the lead set by those who first experienced the impact of the kingdom and the physical presence of Christ, they find that the celibate can, more easily than the married man, observe what the apostle proposed: to discipline the body and give a christian meaning to its function.

Like Paul these christians say: 'We who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies',⁵ and 'our homeland is in heaven, and from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body . . .'⁶ Entirely convinced that 'the body is meant for the Lord',⁷ that 'their bodies are members of Christ',⁸ they wish to 'glorify God in their body',⁹ 'always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in their bodies'.¹⁰ They are especially attentive to these other words of Paul: 'I appeal to you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship'.¹¹ This, they believe, can be primarily related to the perfect observance of continence as a pledge of the future resurrection. Although their decision once taken remains firm, they consider chastity as a goal always to be achieved, trying daily to become celibate in a fuller sense, until their hour comes to meet the Lord. Their commitment to celibacy, rooted in their baptism, finds great consonance and help in their eucharistic

¹ 1 Cor 4, 15.

⁴ 1 Pet 3, 18.

⁷ 1 Cor 6, 13.

¹⁰ 2 Cor 4, 10.

² Jas 1, 18.

⁵ Rom 8, 23.

⁸ 1 Cor 6, 15.

¹¹ Rom 12, 1; Cf Heb 10, 10.

³ Heb 9, 12.

⁶ Phil 3, 21.

⁹ 1 Cor 6, 20.

life, while expressing not in words but in deed what faith, hope, and charity produce in those who abandon everything for the sake of the kingdom.¹

¹ As further readings on celibacy, the following can be suggested:

- Pope Pius XII, *Sacra Virginitas, Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 46 (1954), pp 161-191.
- Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotialis Coelibatus*, A.A.S. 59 (1967), pp 657-697.
- Abbott, W. M. and Gallagher, J. : *The Documents of Vatican II*, esp. pp 446 ff and 565 ff.
- St Augustine, 'Of Holy Virginité', in *Library of the Fathers* (Oxford, 1847), pp 308-352.
- Tertullian, *De Virginitibus Velandis*, ed. E. Dekkers, CCLSL (Turnholt, Brepols 1954), pp 1207-1226.
- Camelot, T.: *Virgines Christi: La virginité aux premiers siècles de l'Eglise* (Paris, 1954).
- Harkx, P. : *The Fathers on Celibacy* (St Norbert Abbey Press, Wisconsin, 1968).
- Audet, J.-P.: *Mariage et célibat dans le service pastoral de l'Eglise: Histoire et orientations* (Paris, 1967).
- Bourassa, F.: *La virginité chrétienne* (Montréal, 1952).
- Soeur Jeanne d'Arc, 'La chasteté et la virginité consacrée, de l'Ancien au Nouveau Testament', in *La Chastité: Problèmes de la religieuse d'aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1953), pp 11-36.
- Bertrams, W.: *Der Zölibat des Priesters* (Würzburg, 1960), pp 7-29.
- Léon-Dufour, X.: 'L'épître du Commun des vierges, 1 Cor 7, 25-35: l'appel au célibat consacré', in *Assemblées du Seigneur* 95 (1966), pp 17-32.
- Plé, A.: 'Celibacy and the Emotional Life', in *The Clergy Review* 55 (1970), pp 27-43.
- O'Neill, D. P.: *Priestly Celibacy and Maturity* (New York, 1965).
- Isaksson, A.: *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple: A Study with Special Reference to Mt 19, 3-12 and I Cor 11, 3-16* (*Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis XXIV* Lund, 1965), especially pp 116-152 (Mt 19, 12 recommends dedicated celibacy the way Paul does).
- Matura, T.: *Célibat et communauté: Les fondements évangéliques de la vie religieuse* (Paris, 1967).