

## VOW OF CHASTITY

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## THEOLOGY OF THE VOWS

### *Vows in General*

#### **1. Definition of Vow / Vows**

A vow is a free and deliberate promise made to God. It is a voluntary act of religion by which we deliberately bind ourselves to something better, which is not commanded by God. It is a sign of self-offering. As religious, we bind ourselves with vows in total self-giving to God. They bind us in conscience and must be lived in a spirit of generosity and love.<sup>1</sup>

***Free and Deliberate*** – Any Christian may be moved by the Spirit to embrace any or all the evangelical counsels privately. But if someone wishes to enter religious life, he/she must vow to live all the three evangelical counsels. Religious life requires public vows which means these vows are organized and regulated under the Church's approval and the profession of these must be officially accepted by the Church. It is voluntary, not out of force or coercion.

***Act of Religion*** – They are self-imposed and often belong to a popular practice of religion. Such a vow is an act of unconditional and total devotion to God. It is a beautiful expression of self-gift to God. The word '*religion*' comes from the Latin word '*ligare*' which means to bind. This is also the actual effect of a vow – it binds the person. Religion is what binds us to God; it is union or oneness with God. The virtue of religion is a quality of our innermost selves which unites us to God. Religion unites us, a vow binds us to this all-holy God.

***A Generous Self-Offering*** – The three vows of religious life must therefore be seen from this point of view of total self-giving to God through a particular way of life. A total self-gift is possible only if we experience and cultivate that deep joy which comes from the Holy Spirit. A joyful heart is both a condition for and a consequence of, a vowed life. To personally experience the joy of self-giving is the best guarantee for a life of total self-giving. One of the hallmarks of

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Malaviaratchi, *Imitation Into Religious Life*, ( India: Redemptionist Publications, 1985 ), p.70.

God's love is generosity, which comes from God's inner goodness and therefore is given freely and in abundance.<sup>2</sup>

*An Act of Worship and a Prayer* – “Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy, and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Rom.12:2; 1 Peter 2:5). Since religious consecration is both a **voluntary** and a **total self-offering to God**, it is a special act of worship. Religious thus consummate a full gift of themselves as a sacrifice offered to God, so their whole existence becomes a continuous worship of God in charity. (Can. 607). The counsels which are divine gifts are taken as vows. That's why when taking these vows, we do not come to God and say “I am not like the rest of men.” Rather, our attitude of heart should be “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13). Hence, a vow is also a cry, a plea, a prayer.<sup>3</sup>

A vow is a solemn promise underpinning a commitment to God or to another person. It is generally considered to be irrevocable, although in practice it is often revoked, as we experience in contemporary marriage.

Solemnizing a vowed commitment in a public (ecclesiastical) context is relatively recent and very much a Western development. In the great Eastern traditions, the vow was considered to be a private personal promise to God, taken and fulfilled with the support and supervision of the guru (a spiritual guide). In the Islamic tradition, even to this day, the vow denotes a serious commitment to fulfill specific duties of the Muslim Faith, pray at the set daily times, go on pilgrimage to a sacred shrine (e.g. Mecca), regularly give to charity.

And in the Christian tradition itself, it is only at the beginning of the thirteenth century that the three vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience were confirmed with official legal status. The canonical implication of living the vowed life are very much a development of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when canon law became an overriding factor in much of Christian theology and spirituality.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Malaviaratchi, *Initiation Into Religious Life*, *ibid.*, pp. 67-69.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>4</sup> Diarmuid O' Murchu, *Poverty, Celibacy, and Obedience*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 21-22.

The vows therefore are conglomerates of values, all of which relate to the human search for meaning. Poverty is not about sacrificing material goods but about exercising stewardship over the goods of creation according to the equality and integrity of the Gospel. Chastity is not about abstinence from sexual thoughts and acts but about engaging with the daily struggles and challenge of authentic sexual and relational growth. Obedience is not about submitting our will to a higher authority but about exploring and proffering ever new ways to engage responsibly, collaboratively, and creatively with the issues of power and powerlessness that we encounter in daily life. The engagement with values, and not the observance of laws, is what the vowed life entails in its primary and fundamental meaning.<sup>5</sup>

There are three traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which most religious profess today. By means of these vows both dimensions of religious profession, **the prophetic stance toward the world** and **the commitment to the transformation of the world in Christ** are specified. The traditional three vows locate this specification in the attitude and behavior of the religious in the areas of the three major dimensions of human life (possession, affectivity and power) which are simultaneously the three major areas of human interaction which structure the world (economics, social life, and politics). The vows do not only direct one's personal energies toward God but contemporary reflection highlights the potential of the vows for enabling the religious to play a significant role in the transformation of the structures of the world through an evangelical contribution to the major areas of human interaction. This awareness of the integrity and wholeness of the religious project is one of the major contributions of contemporary experience to the understanding of religious life. These two aspects though distinct are not separate.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Common Elements/ Characteristics of the Vows

1. Gifts/ charisms of the Holy Trinity ( Trinitarian Dimension )
2. Means and not ends in themselves

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<sup>5</sup> Diarmuid O' Murchu, *Poverty, Celibacy, and Obedience*, *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *New Wineskins: Re-imagining Religious Life Today*, ( USA: Paulist Press, 1986), p. 101.

3. Signs
4. Task
5. Embraced for the sake of the Kingdom of God
6. Interrelated, inseparable and they form a total way of life
7. The goal is love or perfect Charity (common goal to all Christians)
8. Christological origin: namely, the life and teaching of Christ
9. Based on a person's baptismal consecration
10. Require discipline and self-mastery in living it out
11. Multi-faceted reality / Multi-dimensional

The three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience form a single framework of life. **It is a way of life defined by the gift of one's life to God in love.** The vows open the religious to trust in God's companionship and become the channels of His love. As a choice, the vowed life flows from an experience of being touched in some way by God's loving embrace. The vows express a desire to allow God's spirit to penetrate every facet of life.

The three vows serve as **framework not just for living but for loving.** By vows we give our love a future. Love's desire in the vows is more than for the moment. Rather, the vows are a promise that future decisions will be shaped by choices made at the moment.

As a framework of life, the vows make on-going demands. In this, they are a cohesive structure of life, which have an internal consistency. The vows situate religious life as a '**way of living**'. While we cannot predict the future, we vow that our decisions will follow a certain path. We limit our freedom and options in order to give our love direction and purpose.

A framework for love stipulates what will be expected as signs of love, as deeds of love, and as efforts to make love continue to grow.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Judith Merkle, *A Different Touch: A Study of Vows in Religious Life*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998), p. 103.

## VOW OF CHASTITY

### I. INTRODUCTION

The vow of chastity is one of the oldest and the most enduring of all the vows. In Christian religious life, it entails a life-long commitment. This is also ideal in the monastic system of the other great religions but the practice is somewhat different. In all the great monastic systems, celibacy denotes single-mindedness, an unencumbered devotion to God and to the development of spiritual life.<sup>8</sup>

It is unique among the vows professed by the religious. It is the only vow whose content has been a constant factor in all forms of religious life throughout history. It is also the only one of the three vows whose object is, strictly speaking, **and ‘an evangelical counsel’** in the sense that it is a response to an invitation not addressed to all Christians. It is the defining characteristic of religious life.<sup>9</sup>

Chastity / celibacy is freely chosen and lived for evangelical reasons. It is viewed as a commitment of love and not just a renunciation of marriage and sex. To view this vow merely as a renunciation has a great repercussion in the actual living out of the vow of chastity. The old / traditional understanding of chastity which focuses more on denial and renunciation and a negative attitude toward sexuality and marriage as a Christian vocation is often seen today as overly characterized by fear, guilt, repression, and leading to serious affective underdevelopment in many religious.<sup>10</sup>

The contemporary realization of the importance of sexuality in human life and of the irreplaceable role in affective growth of friendship with members of one’s own and the other sex has led to a serious revision of both the theology and the practice of religious celibacy. The focus of attention, both theologically and in practice, is still largely on personal development, the improvement of the affective quality of community life, and the consequent growth of religious in interpersonal effectiveness. Increasingly, however, religious are realizing the corporate significance of their chosen lifestyle as a witness complementary to that of Christian marriage, they are tending to see their celibacy less as a renunciation of marriage and more as a commitment to growth in love dedicated to the development of a world characterized by unselfish service and mutual care.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Diarmuid O’ Murchu, *Poverty Celibacy, an Obedience*, *ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> Sandra Schneiders, *New Wineskins Re-imagining Religious Life Today*, *ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

Consecrated / vowed chastity is a call, a gift / charism, and a task. It is a call initiated by God the Father to follow His Son Jesus Christ, who is chaste, through the power of the Holy Spirit. “Through it the Spirit conforms us with the virginity / chastity of Jesus Christ; it brings us to ‘re-present in the Church’ the virginal / chaste lifestyle of Christ Jesus.”<sup>12</sup>

As a charism, “it is a grace gift given to an individual for the sake of the community. Of its nature, it is a call to service of others in some way.”<sup>13</sup> It is also a gift to be valued since it is not given to all but only to whomever God wills and however He wills.

As a task, it needs the collaboration of the one called. It is an unfinished project, which needs a human cooperation. “It is a gift in germinal stage that does not unfold without the collaboration of freedom. The Spirit, who grants the gift of chastity / virginity without human initiative, does not bring to its fullness without free human collaboration.”<sup>14</sup>

Vowed chastity is a journey by which one becomes a living person through commitment to the Person of Jesus. It is a commitment to love. Religious life is based on the belief that one has been touched by God. The vow of chastity is a response to this touch. It entails obligation of perfect continence in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom. It is a promise to enter into a friendship with Jesus. It is primarily a call of love. Vowed chastity is the conservation of our sexuality, our way of being a man or a woman in the world. As a vow, it touches our embodiment, or how we manifest ourselves, experience, behave and are seen by others as men / women. It is a symbol of our core commitment to God because it concerns our deepest recesses. It is a commitment of our total life and the transformation of our future love. There must be an integration of our spirit and flesh in the vow of chastity. Love of God and others are not abstract. I love you with my body, my senses, my perceptions, my attitudes, my behaviors. How I express myself with my body is an act of relationship with God. A desire to love God with my whole self is made concrete / explicit in my decision not to marry.

God loved us also through the flesh. Through the dedication of His flesh even to the point of the cross, Jesus made His love concrete. It would have been impossible for us to grasp His love at the same depth without a manifestation of love. Our response of love is also specific and

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<sup>12</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy-Virginity for the Kingdom of God*, ( Philippines: ICLA Publications and Claretian Publications, 1995 ), p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> E. Blais, et. al., *Consecrated Celibacy*, ( Canada: Canadian Religious Conference, 1971 ), p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God*, *ibid.*, p. 12.

concrete, not abstract. To see, hear, touch, yearn for, think about, speak to, or relate to another is an embodied and sexual act. Celibacy / chastity touches all aspects of our embodiment and relational capacities.<sup>15</sup>

The vow of chastity calls for an integrity of behavior. That is not easy, as one enters into the complications, which arise in human intimacy. All relationships in a celibate's life have to be judged as to their place in the primary relationship promised to God and the commitment to grow in love implied in the vow.<sup>16</sup>

To live a life of consecrated celibacy / chastity means to build up a community of true love and friendship. This in turn requires the agility to relate with others, with self, with creation, and above all, with God. This is absolutely necessary to grow as persons, as Christian, and as religious.<sup>17</sup>

## II. DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING THE TERMS USED

**1. Celibacy** - is simply the state of being, for whatever reason, unmarried. The celibate person is free to marry when she chooses to do so. In the Christian context celibacy involves, as its appropriate form of chastity, abstention from sexual relations, that is, from fornication or adultery. It is important for religious to realize that in our culture simply being celibate / unmarried is not itself religiously significant.<sup>18</sup>

“Celibacy (coelibatus) is the way of life of lay people outside matrimony and widowhood, of those preparing for priesthood, of the deacons, and of priests. It seems rather a male concept. This term usually refers to men who have renounced marriage for a religious motivation.”<sup>19</sup>

**2. Consecrated Celibacy** – involves, first of all, a free choice to remain unmarried for the whole of one's life to make it a state of life. Consecrated celibacy is the defining characteristic of religious life as a public lifestyle in the Church. It is embraced for religious / supernatural motive, not out of necessity, misfortune, or coercion. Permanence remains an essential characteristic of

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<sup>15</sup> Based on Judith A. Merkle, *A Different Touch: A Study of Vows in Religious Life*, p. 239.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>17</sup> Based on E. Blais, *Consecrated Celibacy*, *ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>18</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *New Wineskins: Re-imagining Religious Life Today*, *ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>19</sup> John Thadathil, *Handouts on Evangelical Counsels and Consecrated Life*, (ICLA, Quezon City, 1999), pp. 71-72.

the life commitment of matrimony and religious profession. Sexual abstinence, that is, abstinence from genital relationships, is the appropriate form of chastity for the consecrated celibate as it is for any Christian celibate.<sup>20</sup>

**3. Chastity (Castitas, Castus)** – “It is difficult to find an appropriate term for religious celibacy. Chastity is certainly inadequate because all Christians are called to chastity and religious chastity is no more chaste than married or single chastity.”<sup>21</sup>

“This is the way of the consecrated (LG 42, 43; PC 1, 5, 12), of those preparing for the priesthood (OT, 10), of young people before getting married (GS, 49), of those already married (GS, 49, 51). This concept is applicable to all Christians. A chaste person is one who lives his/her sexuality in the right way according to his/her vocation and charism. All Christians must be perfectly chaste. People can be physically virgin but not chaste, chaste and not physically virgin.”<sup>22</sup>

**4. Virginitas (Virginitas)** – It is the way of Christ’s life ( LG, 46, 50; PC, 25 ), of Mary (LG , 46, 57, 64 ), of consecrated persons ( LG 42, 50; PC 12, 25 ), of those preparing for priestly ordination ( OT, 10 ), and of priests. It is rather a religious concept applied to all consecrated men and women, and also to the priests. This is often considered as the condition of bodily integrity resulting from the absence of sexual union and maternity.<sup>23</sup>

**5. Human Sexuality** – It includes two principal aspects of a person namely, the identity and interpersonal relationships; and the two dimensions namely, the physical or biological dimension which includes genitality and the spiritual dimension which involves the emotion called love.<sup>24</sup>

**6. Genital Sexuality** – Refers to behavior, thoughts, fantasies, desires, and feelings that involve or promote directly or indirectly genital behavior. Genital intercourse and masturbation are two explicit forms of genital activity. Feelings and fantasies that activate genital processes are also included in genital sexuality.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *New Wineskins: Re-imagining Religious Life Today*, *ibid.*, pp. 208-209.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>22</sup> John Thadathil, *Handouts on Evangelical Counsels and Consecrated Life*, *ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>24</sup> Philomena Agudo, *I Chose You* ( Pasay City, Philippines: Daughters of St. Paul Publications, 1989 ), p. 113.

<sup>25</sup> William F. Kraft, “Celibate Genitality,” *comps.*, *Readings on Psycho-Sexual Dynamics of Human Sexuality*, p. 230.

### III. ANTHROPOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF CHASTITY (HUMAN REALITY)

Here, chastity is viewed within the context of love. Chastity is a profoundly human reality and potentially a powerful social catalyst that leads to transformation. It is a radical call to that intimacy which empowers us to love ourselves, others, and God.<sup>26</sup>

This illustrates how love as a basic human need is present in the three levels of the self namely: the psycho-physiological, psycho-social and spiritual rational. Let us consider this truth as our springboard and our point of departure to dig deeper into the meaning of chastity.

Love is a perspective / angle used in our study of chastity for it is relevant and significant to the latter as a Christian virtue since “Christianity is foremost a religion of love.”<sup>27</sup> By considering the importance of the human dimension, it hopes to capture the essence of the vow which lies in one’s loving relationship, friendship, and intimacy with the self, others, God, and creation. “The spiritual dimension, the loving relationship with God in prayer, meditation, and discernment, is of central importance but it must not become a substitute for the human dimension, as often happened in the past.”<sup>28</sup>

It is worthwhile to note that chastity is more comprehensible in the perspective of love since the former articulates the archetypal human needs for *intimacy*, a *reciprocation of love in total self-giving*, and the *movement towards sexual integration and wholeness*. Love is central in one’s affective growth and maturity.

“Spirituality in the past with its over emphasis on the ‘spirit’ and the rejection of what is physically human succeeded in making consecrated celibates reject their body and eventually hate themselves.”<sup>29</sup>

True, experience is the best educator. We have to learn from the past by trying to minimize if not totally eradicate those, which impede our growth. To aim at wholeness and integration demands an acknowledgement and an appreciation of our humanness.

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<sup>26</sup> Diarmuid O’ Murchu, *Religious Life A Prophetic Vision: Hope And Promise for Tomorrow*, ( Notre Dame Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1991 ), p. 33.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>29</sup> Philomena Agudo, *I Chose You*, pp. 115-116.

## 1. Defining Human Elements in Love through the Three Levels of Psychic Life

A human being is composed of the three levels of the self. Let us delve into it and see how the dynamic interplay of these three levels can be helpful means in understanding the nature and essence of the vow of chastity. Chastity is basically a human reality. The human elements found in it are the foundation needed for a better understanding of the chastity of Christ and of the consecrated person.

*Body* - the material / tangible self.

*Psyche* - it involves feelings, emotions, imaginations, reflection, intellect, memory and will.

*Spirit* - principle of life and of vital activity

### 1) *Psycho - Physiological Level.*

Self-awareness, self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-appreciation are indispensable factors needed in our total self-donation to God. Human beings never fully understand their sexuality or the world unless they profoundly appreciate their own body first, unless they perceive meaning and put meaning into it.

Our bodies are made to react, to sense, to feel, to search, to be satisfied. Thus, our bodies are drawn to and are repelled from persons, situations, and objects, which can be satisfying or fulfilling in a bodily way. Man physically wants to fill, woman to be filled; both want to excite and be excited. Therefore, sensual excitability is innate and natural. At the physiological level, we are spontaneously attracted towards what is perceived as 'good'. This good may sometimes be viewed in its undefined, global perspective. At other times, it may be specific, for example, the desire for one particular person or a particular kind of experience.

We can love others' bodies; touch them for the same reason. Therefore, sensual excitability is innate and natural; it is neither morally good nor morally evil. Our body can be an object of pleasurable sensations. On the physiological level, we seek primarily to touch, to hold, to be touched, to give as to be stimulated, excited, pleased. Sexual attraction may be love (here **love** is merely sympathy, the fruit of a need, of affective physiological experience).

## ***2) Psycho - Social Level.***

We are beings who have need for social contacts, for acceptance, for recognition, for interaction and communication. We need love, care, and attention. We are limited in what we can **do** and **be** for ourselves. We are created to grow through interaction with others and through closeness with others. I am not a self-sufficient person. What I lack is being complemented by others to make me whole and complete. The focus of my attention shifts from my own or the other's bodily presence, gratification and communication to a higher form of **being with** the other more totally. My vision is expanded beyond self-preservation and self-affirmation through cooperation with others.

This level allows the formation of real friendship where recognition of the value of the other as object outside of me is possible. This level is characterized by a benevolent love (wishing others well). It is the core potential at this level. Social obligations and persons become more important elements in our presence to the world than mere bodily pleasure or satisfaction. It is letting people be more important than physical gratification or perfection; to grow in interiority, in inner-directedness, rather than to respond only in an exterior fashion for immediate self-gratification or fulfillment.

## ***3) Spiritual - Rational Level.***

On this level, are found our innate created need to think, to judge, to evaluate, to go beyond the material, the present, immediate senses in order to form concepts which are immaterial and more lasting. We reflect on ends and means and make choices. There is the desire for self-transcendence, for going beyond our own needs. It is based on a truth outside of one's own needs, a value beyond oneself. This level leads us to the spiritual world of love, truth and goodness for their own sake; thus, we are freed from biological determinism or social utilitarianism. It is directed to a good, towards long-range values, which may or may not be physically or socially satisfying. It leads to total availability spiritually, physically, socially, offering the other person my total spirit or soul, my entire being. This involves a gift of self, which is spiritual or moral, not merely a physical gift of self or a psychological gift of self for some mutual gain, but rather a gift of one's soul to another. This is self-transcendence towards the Divine - God.

At this level, love is more than our attraction, even more than collaboration. Love is total, free, unconditional self-gift to the Creator and to others. Authentic love comes through suffering,

through delay of gratification, and finally through self-forgetfulness. It can move us from self-fulfillment to self-transcendence and self-transcendence for the Divine as our goal.<sup>30</sup>

## 2. Kinds of Love Based on Each Level of Psychic Life

1) *Subjective Love (Level - Body)* - ‘**I desire you as good.**’ The attraction is based on sensual pleasure and emotional want. Here, persons become the objects / means towards personal fulfillment or pleasure to fill up my life. The basis of love is the value of pleasure. Gratification and the fulfillment of my needs become primary (Love of Concupiscence)

2) *Benevolent Love (Level - Psyche)* - ‘**I desire your good.**’ Benevolence, friendship or true good are synonymous terms attached to this level. According to Saint Thomas, this level of love springs from the will, from the altruistic feelings for the other. It is more objective, aware of the limitations of the other, and wishing the fulfillment or perfection of the other also. I desire your good. This means that the ‘other’ is treated not as an object that serves my personal fulfillment and gratification but as a person. The basis of love is the value of the person.

3) *Radical or Mad Love (Level - Spirit)* - This level is the meeting point of human and divine love. It is the highest and fullest kind of love. So far we have described mostly natural human love. Psychic qualities, though not guaranteeing virtue or Christian perfection, condition their normal expression and full development. This level of love is not yet a Christian virtue unless we recognize that the order of nature, in the other and in ourselves, originates in God, is guided by Him and depends on Him for existence. Then action takes on a new criterion for evaluation. Now, there are three ordered wills involved, **my own**, that of the **other person**, and the **will of the Creator**.

Grace works through this level, transforming human love into virtuous love. Love becomes a virtue when our chosen action on whatever level exists in the presence of and in response to God - for God’s sake. This includes my own good, the good of the other, and raises both up to and in relation with the only objective good which is the love of God. The basis of love

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<sup>30</sup> Based on Joyce Ridick, *Treasures in Earthen Vessels: The Vows* ( New York: Alba House, 1984 ), pp. 30-36.

is God's love which enables me to give of myself totally and wholly to God - self donation / self-surrender to God.<sup>31</sup>

#### IV. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIAN CHASTITY

Jesus Christ is the model of Christian chastity. It is in the very life of Jesus that this virtue of chastity is perfectly lived, revealed and disclosed. He is the point of reference not only for Christians but also for religious. Apart from Christian chastity (Chastity of Christ), consecrated chastity or the vow of chastity is incomprehensible.

##### 1. The Chastity of Christ

It would be easier to understand the chastity of Christ in relation to purity. "Purity, as defined and explained by Kierkegaard, is to will one thing only."<sup>32</sup> Purity of heart can be referred to as single-mindedness, unadulterated love and cleanness of heart.

"Whoever can love can be pure.

Whoever can be pure can be chaste."<sup>33</sup>

Purity as a Christian virtue is founded in love. Christian love, which is the core of Christian values, is the total self-giving to the other. In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He extolled the virtue of purity. "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God."<sup>34</sup> God Himself is pure, unblemished, all-holy, and unstained by sin and concupiscence. Whoever will live this virtue will likewise experience the beatific vision of God, who is pure, Himself.

Following our principle that whoever can love can be pure and whoever can be pure can be chaste, Jesus Christ is the model of perfect love, and therefore He is pure not because He is celibate but because His sole concern is the Father. He was fully absorbed with the Father's concern, which is the Kingdom of God. For Jesus, "the Kingdom or Reign of God was His great mission, the motive for His incarnation."<sup>35</sup>

True, Jesus was born and became one among us out of love and He died also out of love. Therefore, He was indeed chaste. "Love led Christ to the gift of self, even to the supreme sacrifice

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<sup>31</sup> Based on Joyce Ridick, *Treasures in Earthen Vessels: The Vows*, *ibid.*, pp. 40-42.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> *Matthew* 5:8.

<sup>35</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God*, *ibid.*, p. 2.

of the cross. So too, among His disciples, there can be no true unity without that unconditional, mutual love which demands a readiness to serve others generously, a willingness to welcome them as they are, without judging them ( Mt. 7:1-2 ) and an ability to forgive ( Mt. 18:22 ).”<sup>36</sup>

Regarding purity of heart, Jesus did not only forbid adultery but also impure thoughts and desires. Thus, He said, "I say to you that anyone who do much as look with lust at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”<sup>37</sup> According to the Webster dictionary chaste means pure in thought and act, innocent of unlawful sexual intercourse; celibate; severely simple in design or execution; clean or spotless.<sup>38</sup>

Jesus did not only teach the virtue of purity / chastity but lived it with steadfastness and faithfulness. If Christian chastity is viewed in the context of purity, then this virtue is addressed to all Christians regardless of their vocation in life. Married Christians can practice the virtue of chastity by being faithful to one person only, his wife / her husband. Religious and celibate persons are expected to love God above all else and be pre-occupied with His affairs and concerns. Jesus’ way of loving is the purest and most perfect. He wanted that His way of loving must be the standard of loving also for His followers. “Love one another as I have loved you.”<sup>39</sup>

### ***1) Chastity For the Sake of the Kingdom of God***

Jesus Christ assumed the condition of a celibate chastity for ‘the sake of the Kingdom of God’ (Mt. 19:12). He was a eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Becoming a eunuch for God’s Kingdom is an alternative lifestyle, which has a deep prophetic significance. It was a symbol of the relationship of His person with the Kingdom but was at the same time a privileged instrument for making the Kingdom present.<sup>40</sup> His was a “celibacy that reveals a new style of filial and mystical relationship with God, of fraternal, communitarian and diaconal relationship with human beings and of lordly relationship with things. Thus, the celibacy of Jesus is a symbol and a parable of the Kingdom.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 42b.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 5:28.

<sup>38</sup> *Webster Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, ( USA: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1991 ).

<sup>39</sup> John 15:12.

<sup>40</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God*, *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Celibate chastity is a way of life, a gift, a charism that comes with the dawning of God's Kingdom. "Not all man can receive this precept but only those to whom it is given."<sup>42</sup> A gift is something gratuitously and freely given, and freely accepted on the part of the recipient. Thus, Jesus underlines the gift of character of celibate chastity when He further says: "He, who is able to receive this gift, let him receive it."<sup>43</sup>

"Celibate life expresses attachment to God as a lover. To direct human love exclusively to God who is the path to perfect freedom and to the attainment of total union with God."<sup>44</sup> This is precisely the reason why Jesus Christ embraced celibacy in order that He can attend to the affairs or business of His Father. This free and deliberate choice has a close reference to the renunciations which Jesus demanded in Mt. 19:29, "Anyone who has left houses, brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children or lands for my sake, will receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life."<sup>45</sup> Scriptures vividly promise us a solid foundation for a life of chastity, poverty and obedience through the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The very life of Jesus was offered as a total holocaust to the Father and His Kingdom as an expression of His deep and undivided love for the Father. This is the essence of His celibate chastity. "Jesus' existence is a **eucharistic existence**: bread handed out, as wine poured out, which, in the very utterness of its self-offering, gives life in its own dying. By dying Jesus gives life and life in abundance. Jesus was not concerned for Himself. He neither protected nor gratified His body. His body was always the immolated body, the Eucharistic body, handed over. (Luke 22:10). The death on the cross is the supreme movement of the sacrifice that began in the Incarnation."<sup>46</sup>

It is in this context that we can understand the depth and nature of Christ's celibate chastity. "It was the great existential sign of His mission in service of the coming of the Kingdom. It was a parable of His death, decided upon out of LOVE."<sup>47</sup>

## ***2) Total Devotion to the Father's Concerns***

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<sup>42</sup> Matthew 19:11.

<sup>43</sup> Matthew 19:12.

<sup>44</sup> Anthony Malaviaratchi, *Initiation Into Religious Life*, *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>45</sup> Matthew 19:29.

<sup>46</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God*, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God*, *ibid.*, p. 4.

Though not married, Jesus Christ still finds fecundity in His celibate chastity by devoting Himself wholeheartedly to the Father's concerns or business, giving Himself totally to the Father in love through His loving service for the building of His Kingdom here on earth. The fruitfulness of His ministry finds its origin / source in His virginal relationship with the Father. "God the Father is, for Jesus, the one worthy of being loved above all things, because there is no reality that can compare with Him in beauty, goodness, existential richness or capacity to attract."<sup>48</sup> "The world must know that I love the Father and do as the Father has commanded me."<sup>49</sup> The overwhelming love of Jesus for the Father motivates Him to offer Himself as a holocaust of love, even to the point of dying on the cross. The will of the Father becomes His food and drink; His daily nourishment. With this unconditional love shown by the Son, the Father finds all His delight in the Son. Thus, the Father acknowledges it by saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, the celibate chastity of Jesus enables Him to devote Himself wholeheartedly to the concerns of the Father. When His parents found Him in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, they asked Him, "Why have you done this to us?" His answer was "did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"<sup>51</sup> Jesus is indeed the "eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom."<sup>52</sup> "So great is the drawing power that the Kingdom exerts on Jesus that He remains incapacitated for matrimony. He had to be the mediator of the Father's love to all humankind, the parable of God, the Spouse of His people."<sup>53</sup>

"He came to give life to all, abundant and eternal life"<sup>54</sup> through His death. His affective life was absolutely gratified / fulfilled in His unconditional relationship of love with the Father.

## 2. The Chastity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Blessed Virgin Mary is also considered as the model of chastity among Christians and religious. "Among all persons consecrated unreservedly to God, she is the first. She is also one of

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> John 14:31.

<sup>50</sup> Matthew 3:17.

<sup>51</sup> Luke 2:48-49.

<sup>52</sup> Matthew 19:11-12.

<sup>53</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy – Virginitiy for the Kingdom of God*, *ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

the most fully consecrated to God, consecrated in the most perfect way.”<sup>55</sup> She was conceived without sin, The Immaculate Conception. Her whole life is the most perfect reflection of Divine beauty and holiness. Her holiness stems from her deep union with the Persons of the Holy Trinity. No wonder she received the highest appreciation from the Most High as the “highly favored daughter of God,”<sup>56</sup> the Mother of the Son of God,<sup>57</sup> and the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, the “temple of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>58</sup> During her visit to her cousin Elizabeth, Elizabeth cried out in jubilation upon meeting her saying, “Most blessed are you among women.”<sup>59</sup>

Vita Consecrata affirms that “Mary in fact is the sublime example of perfect consecration, since she belongs completely to God and is totally devoted to Him. Mary’s presence is of fundamental importance both for the spiritual life of each consecrated person and for the solidity, unity, and progress of the whole community.”<sup>60</sup>

“Consecrated life looks to her as the sublime model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son, and openness to the Holy Spirit, in the knowledge that acceptance of the virginal and humble life of Christ also means imitation of Mary’s way of life.”<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, she is an example of virginity or of consecrated chastity. Mary is an example of virginity, but within the distinctive conditions in which she had to live it: being both mother and wife. She was a virgin-spouse. She lived her virginity in permanent reference to her spousal condition, being the faithful wife of Joseph and also in permanent reference to her maternity: that is her first maternity over Jesus ( Mother of God ), and afterwards, her maternity over the disciples of Jesus ( Mother of the Church ).<sup>62</sup> She gave her whole self, body and soul at the service of her family: her family of Nazareth and her family that is the Church. She is indeed a sign and an expression of total availability and commitment to God the Father and His Kingdom through her consecrated chastity. Her chastity was preserved through her most intense interpersonal communion with the Triune God. Thus, she becomes the model of religious consecration. “She is

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<sup>55</sup> *Potissimum Institutioni*, 20.

<sup>56</sup> Luke 1:28.

<sup>57</sup> Luke 1:31-32, 43.

<sup>58</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 53.

<sup>59</sup> Luke 1:42.

<sup>60</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 28.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God*, *ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

the Mother of religious in being the Mother of Him who was consecrated and sent, and in her fiat and magnificent religious life finds the totality of its surrender to and the thrill of its joy in the consecratory action of God.”<sup>63</sup>

### 3. The Chastity of Christians

Christians are believers and followers of Christ – His lifestyle, values and His whole person especially His way of relating and loving. He is always our point of reference. “The virtue of chastity is not childhood innocence. Chastity is a free choice. It is practiced by married people, single persons and celibates when they make an adult choice to be chaste.”<sup>64</sup> Married people can be chaste when they are able to be faithful to their conjugal partner.

“The virtue of chastity qualifies the sexuality of men and women in relation to their objects. Chastity consists of living our sexuality according to the value assigned them in the economy of the Kingdom. The virtue affects the different states of life: matrimony, non-consecrated celibacy, and consecrated celibacy.”<sup>65</sup> The virginal body modestly avoids appearing to advertise itself sexually. To affirm oneself as a personal presence is to manifest oneself as a countenance, not a sex. Modesty, which is expressed in a certain mobility of the body, in the way of dressing, and of relating becomes the sacrament of spiritual virginity. Chastity, which is applicable both for the married and celibate, signifies unification, pacification, integrity and wholeness of being.<sup>66</sup>

That’s why the Blessed Virgin Mary though she was married but remained pure and chaste as she desired only one thing – to please the Lord through her faithful fulfillment of her duties as the mother of the Son of God and as the wife of Joseph.

## V RELIGIOUS CHASTITY ( VOW OF CHASTITY )

### 1. Dimensions of Religious Chastity

Speaking about the vow of chastity, we refer this to consecrated chastity or religious chastity embraced by some for the sake of the Kingdom of God. This is the chastity of the

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<sup>63</sup> *Potissimum Institutioni*, 20; *EE*, 53.

<sup>64</sup> Anthony Malaviaratchi, *Initiation Into Religious Life*, *ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>65</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God*, *ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>66</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God*, *ibid.*, p. 11.

celibates / virgins. Consecrated chastity is the gift of the Holy Trinity. It is a charism given to some whom God wills. “The chastity of celibates, as a manifestation of dedication to God with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-34), is a reflection of the infinite love which links the Three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity, the love to which the Incarnate Word bears witness even to the point of giving His life, the love poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which evokes a response of total love for God and the brethren.”<sup>67</sup> “By embracing chastity, they make their own the pure love of Christ and proclaim to the world that He is the Only-Begotten Son who is one with the Father (cf. Mk. 14:11).”<sup>68</sup> “It expresses attachment to God as a lover. To direct human love exclusively to God is the path to perfect freedom and to the attainment of total union with God.”<sup>69</sup> The presence of the Kingdom of God and God’s unfathomable love so overwhelm the person that he/she cannot do anything but respond through embracing the rare way of consecrated chastity. So here, we can say that celibacy is not a means to the Kingdom but the result of the overwhelming presence of the Kingdom of God. It is a proof and a sign that the Kingdom of God is already in our midst. The offer of God’s love takes hold of the person that he/she can only do one thing - that is to give himself/herself entirely to it. So the celibate chastity becomes a free and deliberate choice as a consequence of an experience of God’s love. The renunciation of marriage becomes a spontaneous and inevitable consequence. They are the people who freely and deliberately choose to become eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom. (Mt. 19:11).

Consecrated chastity points to the primacy of God’s love. The love can take hold of us so overwhelmingly, that we become incapable of marriage; we lose our taste for marriage, for in faith we have tasted something still better. The deepest cause for a life of celibacy is the uncompromising nature of love for God who as the fullness of love unshakably grips us first. Thus, consecrated / celibate chastity relativizes the all-important reality of marriage and family life; and shows that God’s love alone is absolute.<sup>70</sup>

### ***1) Chastity as a Charism ( Charismatic Dimension of Chastity )***

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<sup>67</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 21.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 16c.

<sup>69</sup> Anthony Malaviaratchi, *Initiation Into Religious Life*, *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>70</sup> Based on Anthony Malaviaratchi, *Initiation Into Religious Life*, *ibid.*, p. 94.

a. Like Christ and For Christ

Consecrated chastity involves total self-giving as a response to the call from God to value a plan of life and mission which is primarily the worship and close imitation of Jesus Christ. What is this mission for which a person makes this holocaust of self? “He who renounces matrimony confesses publicly his/her trust to find God, fulfillment of his/her needs of love; he/she attests with his life to treasure and to believe in the promise of the Gospel; to demonstrate in the person that eternal life is a reality which already has begun on this earth.”<sup>71</sup>

The vow of chastity is a real holocaust of body and soul, a holocaust made as the most direct and rapid way to the perfection of chastity. The soul is given through love, the body through chastity. It is a joyful and loving acceptance of a celibate chastity as a permanent way of life, out of our desire to imitate Jesus Christ who is the object of our love.

Chastity frees the human heart in a remarkable manner (1Cor. 7:32-35), so that it burns with love for God and for all people. One of the greatest contributions which religious can bring to humanity today is certainly that of revealing, by their life more than by their words, the possibility of true dedication to, and openness towards others, in sharing in their joys, in being faithful and constant in love without a thought of domination or exclusiveness.<sup>72</sup>

Consecrated chastity brings about a special relationship with the Person of Jesus Christ.

- ◆ It gives Christ in a real concrete way the central place that is given to the spouse in a good marriage.
- ◆ Christ becomes the spouse, the life-partner. Just as genuine marriage takes place only when two people are fascinated by each other’s love, so too, joyful celibacy is possible only if we are fascinated by Christ’s love.
- ◆ The absolute claim that Christ has on us is made real as possible – martyrdom alone surpasses celibacy in this regard.
- ◆ By an actual renunciation, a life of celibacy shows that Christ’s love is as real as the love of a good spouse.
- ◆ It unites us to Christ because celibacy makes a gift of self to Christ, as does marriage to the partner in life.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Joyce Ridick, *Treasures in Earthen Vessels: The Vows*, ibid., p. 49.

<sup>72</sup> *Potissimum Institutioni*, 13d.

<sup>73</sup> Anthony Malaviaratchi, *Initiation Into Religious Life*, ibid., p. 95-96.

*b. For the Sake of the Kingdom*

Jesus Himself assumed the celibate condition according to the testimony of Matthew, “for the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>74</sup> His being a eunuch is considered as an alternative lifestyle, which has a deep prophetic significance: it was a symbol of the relationship of His person with the Kingdom and a privileged instrument for making the Kingdom present.

The celibacy of Jesus is defined by all the dimensions that constitute the coming of the Kingdom. It is a celibacy that reveals a new style of filial and mystical relationship with God, of fraternal, communitarian, and diaconal relationship with human beings and lordly relationship with things. Thus, the celibacy of Jesus is a symbol and parable of the Kingdom.<sup>75</sup>

Celibate chastity of the Kingdom is then a sharing in Christ’s own way of life. Christ the Lord Himself is the model of the virginal life of religious. He is more than a model. He is also the source of our celibacy and consecrated chastity. Here, we can conclude that celibacy is a gift to us of Jesus’ own celibate way of life. Renunciation of marriage for the sake of the Kingdom in actual practice means celibacy for the sake of Christ. It is present where God truly rules, where His will is precisely obeyed.<sup>76</sup>

*c. The Value of the Gift of Chastity*

Chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven (Mt. 19:12), which the religious profess, must be esteemed as an exceptional gift of grace. It uniquely frees the heart of man (1 Cor. 7:32-35), so that he becomes more fervent in love for God and for all men. For this reason it is a most effective means of dedicating themselves whole-heartedly to the divine service and the works of the apostolate. Thus for all Christ’s faithful, religious recall that wonderful marriage made by God, which will be fully manifested in the future age, and in which the Church has Christ for her only spouse.<sup>77</sup>

Consecrated chastity is not a refusal to love, rather, it is a commitment to love. Sex gets its true meaning and beauty from love and self-giving to the spouse. So does consecrated chastity.

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<sup>74</sup> *Matthew* 19:12.

<sup>75</sup> Based on Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy – Virginitiy for the Kingdom of God*, *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Based on Anthony Malaviaratchi, *Initiation Into Religious Life*, *ibid.*, p. 95-96.

<sup>77</sup> Based on *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12.

The dichotomy between sex and love can lead to the dichotomy between celibacy and love. By renouncing marriage, we do not discard our capacity to love. The same is true with regard to chastity. As in marriage, a male religious offers initiative, fatherliness, strength, support and everything else that is part of his masculine, sexual nature; while a female religious offers tenderness, ability to care, motherliness and all that is part of her feminine, sexual nature. Moreover, a life of chastity can truly be expressed only in self-giving love; it is as valid and as enriching an expression of human sexuality as marriage is. <sup>78</sup> “Through consecrated chastity, celibates in a special way, share in the Church’s spousal relationship with Christ, by being exclusively set apart for Him.” <sup>79</sup>

### **Teachings of the Church regarding Consecrated Chastity**

( Based on Vatican II, Religious Life # 12; Code of Canon Law # 599 )

- ◆ The Evangelical Counsel of Chastity is a surpassing gift of grace.
- ◆ It is embraced for the sake of the Kingdom of God.
- ◆ It expresses a greater love for God and for all men and women.
- ◆ It is a sign of the world to come. ( Eschatological Sign )
- ◆ It is a special way of offering one’s life in the service of God and His people.
- ◆ It gives witness to the spousal relationship between the Church and Christ, her only spouse.
- ◆ A life of chastity demands trust in God and the practice of mortification. <sup>80</sup>
- ◆ The object of the vow of chastity is the renunciation of marriage and the observance of perfect continence or a life of perfect continence through celibacy.

### **2 ) Community Dimension of Religious Chastity**

Religious chastity or the vow of chastity is better lived in the community. “Because religious community is a school of love (Schola Amoris) which helps one grow in love for God and for one’s brothers and sisters, it is also a place for human growth.” <sup>81</sup> It is not true, based on the common notion, that embracing religious chastity can stifle one’s growth and development

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<sup>78</sup> Anthony Malaviaratchi, *Initiation Into Religious Life*, *ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>80</sup> Anthony Malaviaratchi, *Initiation Into Religious Life*, *ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>81</sup> *Fraternal Life in Community*, 35.

because there are many saints who championed the crown of eternal life; lots of great religious men and women who prove it otherwise. Community life must be fostered and deepened to allow space and growth for each member and to develop to its fullest their capacity to become fecund for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Consecrated chastity / religious chastity which implies great purity of mind, heart and body, expresses a great freedom for loving God and all that is His, with an undivided love and thus with a total availability for loving and serving all others, making present the love of Christ. This love, neither selfish nor exclusive, neither possessive nor enslaved to passion, but universal and disinterested, free and freeing, so necessary for mission is cultivated and grows through fraternal life.<sup>82</sup>

Religious community becomes a concrete place and a training ground where a religious can better incarnate, express, and live God's commandment of love, "Love God with all your heart...and love your neighbor as you love your self,"<sup>83</sup> "Love one another as I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."<sup>84</sup> It is where the value of religious chastity as a sign becomes very expressive dynamic, and alive. Religious community as a gift / charism is a sign of a Trinitarian communion, an ecclesial communion, a place for becoming brothers and sisters. It also becomes the place and subject of mission.<sup>85</sup> Religious community invites the religious to be a sign of unity. Our highest vocation is "to enter into communion with God and with our brothers and sisters."<sup>86</sup> Through a common life, religious share in Trinitarian communion, which can change human relationship and create a new type of solidarity. "Consecrated persons live for God and from God, and precisely for this reason they are able to bear witness to the reconciling power of grace, which overcomes the division tendencies present in the human heart and a society."<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, religious community can be a safeguard against temptations that beset the religious in their spiritual journey. It becomes their support, their shield, their refuge. It is also an oasis of love where they can be refreshed through the love and care of the members of the community. "Above all, everyone should remember – superiors especially, that chastity has

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>83</sup> Matthew 22:37-39.

<sup>84</sup> John 13:34-35.

<sup>85</sup> Based on *Fraternal Life in Community*.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>87</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 41b.

strong safeguards in a community when true fraternal love thrives among its members.”<sup>88</sup> It is quite true that the quality of fraternal / communal life has significant impact on the perseverance of individual religious. Just as the poor quality of fraternal life has been mentioned frequently by many as the reason for leaving religious life, so fraternity lived fully has often been, and still is, a valuable support for the perseverance of many.

Within a truly fraternal community, each member has a sense of co-responsibility for the faithfulness of the others; each one contributes to a serene climate of sharing life, of understanding, and of mutual help; each is attentive to the moments of fatigue, suffering, isolation, or lack of motivation in others; each offers support to those who are saddened by difficulties and trials. Thus, religious communities, in the support they give to the perseverance of their members also acquire the value of a sign of the abiding fidelity of God, and thus become a support to the faith and fidelity of Christians who are immersed in the events of this world, where the paths of fidelity seem to be less and less known.<sup>89</sup>

The mystery of God’s giving and loving is but expressed not in isolation but in the communion or interpersonal relationship with others especially in the community. It is a privilege of encountering concretely the Persons of the Holy Trinity, not merely in theory. “To live a life of consecrated or religious celibacy / chastity means to build up a community of true love and friendship.”<sup>90</sup> Love becomes central in the living out of the vow of chastity. Love of God is made concrete in one’s love of neighbor and vice versa. “Community that is not mystical has no soul, but community that is not ascetic has no body. Synergy between the gift of God and personal commitment is required for building an incarnated communion, for giving, in other words, flesh and concrete existence to grace and to the gift of fraternal communion.”<sup>91</sup>

### ***3 ) Ecological Dimension of Religious Chastity***

To understand better the ecological dimension of chastity, we will define first ecology as a science and as a movement; its significance in the formation of religious life, and the Holy Trinity as an ecological God.

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<sup>88</sup> *Potissimum Institutioni*, 12.

<sup>89</sup> Based on *Fraternal Life in Community*, 57.

<sup>90</sup> E. Blais, *Consecrated Celibacy*, *ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>91</sup> *Fraternal Life in Community*, 23.

a. Fundamental Concepts of Ecology

Ecology speaks to us about nature, about the very complex network of actions and reactions and interactions that take place in the universe, in the world. As a science, it is rather new. It deals with the relationships among living creatures – obviously about human beings – and their environment or milieu. Real ecology qualifies everything that is human. Nowadays, several authors believe that without any reference to sociology, ecology remains mutilated and fragmented. Ecology introduces us into a highly complex universe and into our own world which has an ecological structure.<sup>92</sup>

Ecology is also a movement. A movement is something collective; it implies many things. It is an energy and power that makes life. Life is movement and collective movement is life.<sup>93</sup> As a movement, it creates energy, a power, or a push that opens up the minds and hearts of the people to the new awakening / awareness of their need to be in harmony with all the creation of the universe. Collectively, we begin to see the significance of our interrelatedness with our environment and with all the creation of God. In the ecological perspective man is no longer a separate super-special creature whose very life is totally dependent on God and on his fellow human beings alone. Man's very existence finds its meaning in his interconnectedness and interdependence among all creation, too.

This ecological movement provides an avenue for us to examine our relationship with our environment – nature, world, and universe of which we are very much a part. Man has a tremendous influence that he can offer in living and preserving life. This movement calls for a response or action. It is a challenge, which we have to face and deal with conscientiously because ecological crisis and problems greatly affect human lives.

“Nature is our friend. We must follow our nature which guides us and we have to guide the nature we are following; we have to guide at the same time that we are guided.”<sup>94</sup> Here, the idea of interdependence between man and nature is very transparent.

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<sup>92</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, “*The Ecological Movement and Religious Life*”, Religious Life Asia ( July – September, 2000 ): pp. 18-19.

<sup>93</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, Lecture on “*Ecological Perspective of Consecrated Life*”, ( ICLA, Quezon City, 1999 ).

<sup>94</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, “*The Ecological Movement and Religious Life*”, Religious Life Asia, *ibid.*, p. 22.

*b. Ecological Dimension of Religious Chastity*

“Religious chastity is better understood in the context of our relationship with our body and nature. Our own body is the place of this venture of celibacy / chastity. The body is nature; and because of this, in the body are experienced the natural limitations and acts of sin which have infected nature itself.”<sup>95</sup> Since the body is subject to corruption and sin, it must be liberated in order to have a redeemed body. True, the “goal of a vocation to consecrated life is to acquire the redemption of nature also and the reconciliation - communion with it in imitation of Jesus.”<sup>96</sup> Like nature, it needs to be cultivated and nurtured through proper education and formation that befit our virginal / celibate life. Our body is a house or a place where we exercise our celibacy. It is in the house where we experience harmony, peace, respect, joy, and love. It is also a place of relationship. Our body is very important because it is a visible manifestation or expression of the interior life. The body is the mirror of our soul. The body expresses / manifests the complex reactions and interactions that happen within and outside of it. The body relates.

Nature is not exterior to us because in our body we are nature. Nature is ours and we are and exist in nature. From nature we are fed, we receive the vital fluid, and nature makes us grow; it makes us sick and heals us; in nature our body will be dissolved by death. To establish a tension between our own body and the world, not to recognize the mysterious communion, which exists between them, implies a great imbalance for the same person and an impoverishment of nature.<sup>97</sup>

Our body is precious gift of God. It is not only a gift. It is also a task. It is not something to be rejected. The body must be revered, cared for, loved, educated and valued. It is not enough to be a body – nature; we have to pass the body – culture. The deepest spiritual experiences have to be integrated in the body. And the corporal sensations have to be assumed by spirituality.

The experience of the charism of virginity / chastity has to express itself in one’s own body. The body of the man or woman who has received the charism of evangelical virginity, not only as a symbol organism, but also as an event of the revelation of the person, has to emanate a permanent message of virginal chastity. The virginal body avoids with prudence appearing as a

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>97</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, “*The Ecological Movement and Religious Life*”, Religious Life Asia, ibid., p. 31.

sexual object. To affirm oneself as a personal presence is to manifest oneself as face, not as sex. The virginal prudence is like a sacrament of the spiritual virginity and it expresses itself in the mobility of the body, in dress, even in the relationship with the infrahuman world.

It is through the body that a person reaches the heart of the world in order to transmit to it the great gift of the Father, the Kingdom. Through the body the celibate, the virgin, enters in relation with other bodies of creation: the human and the infrahuman ones. In that way also Jesus enters in contact with us: 'this is my body', 'who touched me?' There is a virginal style, which defines this relation with the universe: it is what we call the ecological dimension of chastity.

Ecological virginity characterizes itself by the prophetic cult to life. It brings us to a relation with nature, full of compassion, respect and veneration. It is a renunciation of dominion (obedience), of oppression (poverty), and of violence (chastity). It is a respectful veneration in front of the mystery of life. Proper to virginity is to honor, to venerate, and to protect life, especially human life and life in nature. The type of relationship with nature that Francis of Assisi lived out serves as an orientation to understand the virginity in ecological perspective.<sup>98</sup>

To think ecologically is to think of several beings in relationship, how they are interconnected by actions, reactions, and interactions. This new ecological thinking leads us to the awareness that a person cannot be defined without the environment, that for a person the state of equilibrium or balance is to live in harmonious relationship with all creation. This growing idea has a great repercussion in consecrated life. To follow Christ today is to be a communitarian man and woman, always in solidarity with others. God created man not to be in isolation but to be one with or to be in communion with others. (*Nilikha ng Diyos ang tao hindi upang mag-isa bagkus upang makiisa at magkaisa*). We are all pilgrims here on earth. We journey together as a Church. All the members of the Church in all states of life journey together, thus, consecrated persons and those in the hierarchy of Church should not go ahead in the march and leave others behind. Our social and ecological responsibility calls our attention to help our brothers and sisters who are weak so that as Church we can move forward together as one.

Ecologically we are challenged to adapt a new spirituality, a spirituality of relationship – relationship with God (*Leitourgia*), of communion (*Koinonia*), of service (*Diakonia*), and of ecology (*Oikologia*) which relates us with nature. Nature provides us a compass that directs us

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<sup>98</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, "The Ecological Movement and Religious Life", Religious Life Asia, *ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

towards God our Creator. As eco-formators, we also need to be ecologically formed too, so that we may become signs of harmony and peace to others.

*c. The Trinity is Interactive: An Ecological God*

Ecology is a complex and complete interplay of relations. It includes everything, disregards nothing, values everything, and cares for everything. It relies on the foremost intuition of Christianity: its divine conception. It affirms the one nature of the Godhead, but at the same time maintain the diversity of the divine Persons without in any way ‘multiplying God’ into a number of gods. Christianity has always believed that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Those divine Persons co-exist eternally, are distinct, united, equally eternal and infinite.

The Trinity is three distinct Persons, but links of life, the loving correlations, and the eternal interplay of relations among them are such that the three exist, subsist in one. They are the one God – communion, the one God – relation, the one God – love.

The universe is the reproduction of this diversity and this union. The world, indeed, is complex, diverse, one, united and interrelated, because it is a reflection of the Trinity. God invades every being, enters into every relationship, and erupts into every eco-system. But God especially sacramentalizes the life of every human individual because we find intelligence, will, and sensibility as distinct concretizations of our one humanity, whole and entire. We are a unique life and form of communion realized distinctly. We are one and at the same time multiple, like the mystery of the Triune God.<sup>99</sup>

**4) *Missionary and Apostolic Dimension of Religious Chastity***

As Jesus Christ assumed celibate chastity for the sake of the Kingdom, so must His followers who are gifted with this particular charism. There are many reasons why people are celibate, but for those who are called and have positively responded to His invitation, the motive must be service in love for the sake of the Reign of God. Like any other vows, consecrated chastity has also a missionary dimension.

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<sup>99</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, ( Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1995 ), pp. 48-49.

“For the sake of the Kingdom, Jesus created a community around Him. For the sake of the Kingdom He and His community put themselves at the service of all people, especially that of the most needy. The celibacy for which Jesus opted qualified His style of mission.”<sup>100</sup>

The mission of Jesus was not carried out alone by Himself but in communion with all the members of His mystical body. We are His extended body consecrated for the sake of God’s Kingdom. We are His heads, hands, hearts and feet on earth. We adapt His lifestyle and missionary spirit. Like Jesus, religious vowed to consecrated chastity must also bear the marks which Jesus bore in His very flesh; these are the marks of His commitment to love. Love was the sole reason of His birth and the sole reason of His death. Love is a very powerful force that brings everybody into one single family of God. It is love that enables us to become courageous people of our time who announce and proclaim to all humankind the goodness and the Fatherhood of God and who denounce the “excessive and discriminatory society and the affective marginalization to which millions of human persons are submitted.”<sup>101</sup> Following the chaste and celibate Jesus is a “form of availability to work, in the midst of risks, for justice, love, peace and fraternity: for the great values of the Kingdom. It is a sign and source of deeply committed and universal fraternity.”

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Just as poverty brought Jesus closer to the poorest of the poor, so celibacy brought Him closer to the lonely of this world. Thus, through the Person of Jesus, one of the most unhappy situations of humankind – aloneness – could be incorporated into the Kingdom of His Abba. Through His celibacy, Jesus proclaimed that every man and woman, without excluding absolutely anyone, and especially those who were most alone on earth, were called to form the unique family of the children of God.<sup>103</sup>

The chastity / virginity of Jesus for the sake of the Kingdom is also a real way of overcoming the fear of the opposite sex as a temptation, in order to recover him/her as a companion in the liberating mission of the Gospel. Thus, mission is not carried out in solitude but in company or in communion with others. We men and women, must rediscover one another as companions; we should once more, as in the earliest days, walk together, always free and mature,

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<sup>100</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God*, *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>101</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God*, *ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

and thus come to reunite what has been conventionally separated in the religious life, on the basis of so many fears.

Consecrated chastity / virginity assumed for the sake of the Kingdom enables the religious to make present in the midst of the world God's love and passion for humankind. It manifests that the heart of God, is above all, with the most oppressed of His children in order to rescue them, and it denounces the power of the evil one. So must our love be disinterested and committed to firmly fight against unbridled eroticism, against commercialization of sex, and against the hedonistic and selfish invasion of life in our times.

Virginal love for the Kingdom must inspire religious towards actions and initiatives of a striking generosity on behalf of the lonely and the abandoned. It is manifested in the missionary and diaconal caring of men and women who are not afraid of losing their life for others, who are not overly concerned with preserving it. It is a love, a life totally offered as a holocaust to God for life.<sup>104</sup>

### ***5) Ascetical Dimension of Religious Chastity***

#### ***a. Religious Chastity as Fasting From, For, With***

Any authentic fasting needs these three elements of **fasting from**, **fasting for**, and **fasting with**. Jesus made clear that His disciples will fast from food when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them (alluding to His death, resurrection, ascension). This fast is a longing for His return. Our fasting from will be incomplete / meaningless and a burden without the reasons why we fast. The 'why' or the intention is also important. And we cannot fast for something without fasting from something else.

Since both fasting from and fasting for can be so difficult, support is needed. This is where fasting together with each other can make a difference. Authentic fasting involves giving up some good. However, the good that is given up, is not perceived by the one who fasts as of the same significance as the object of the fast. This implies some kind of purposefulness to the fast. What is fasted from is not perceived to be as important as what is fasted for. Finally fasting does not

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<sup>104</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God*, *ibid.*, pp. 20-23.

represent an individual thing; it has a communal dimension: then ‘they will fast on those days’ (Luke 5:35).<sup>105</sup>

### ❖ Fasting From

This answers the question *what* to fast from or what to give up as celibates in order to grow in our relationship and intimacy with the self, others, creation, and above all with God. The fasting from will only have a deeper meaning depending upon the purpose or motive of the fast. We can fast from something or anything else under the sun. But does this giving up lead us to reach our goal in life?

Example: when celibates endeavor to forego all directly willful and pleasurable indulgence in genital sex, whether with others or alone, such a stress on this aspect of celibacy highlights the problems that we continue to face today when we limit the discussion of celibacy to the notion of abstinence in isolation.<sup>106</sup>

Another striking and worth reflecting examples which the Michael H. Crosby himself poses to us as regards fasting from are the dyads that are found in the differences between *aloneness* and *loneliness* on one hand, *estrangement* and *separation* on the other.

- ◆ Celibacy from = aloneness = a sense limited to the self
- Celibacy for = loneliness = a sense extending the self to another
- ◆ Celibacy from = estrangement = a sense of alienation, of being a stranger
- Celibacy for = separation = a sense of being with, a sense of presence

Aloneness depicts images of *abandonment*, *isolation*, *despair*, and the *existential vacuum*. A celibate experiencing aloneness is an individual without personal intimacy or a male or female without sexual intimacy. Oftentimes the aloneness is grounded in an obsession that one is unable to be genital.

Conversely, to be a celibate who knows loneliness is a person who knows intimacy. Loneliness implies longing, a longing for the other while aloneness implies being one’s self, void of the other. A celibate who experiences loneliness longs for the presence of the other. The

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<sup>105</sup> Michael H. Crosby, *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart*, ( USA: Ave Maria Press, Inc., 1996 ), p. 159-180.

<sup>106</sup> Michael H. Crosby, *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart*, *ibid.*, p. 66.

presence has been celebrated, but it is not available to the senses at this time. The embrace of loneliness reveals something that rests at the heart of what it means to be an authentic celibate.

The second dyad is about estrangement ( fasting from ) and separation ( fasting for ). One who is estranged is alien or stranger to others. Others are no longer welcomed; there is no hospitality, no dwelling or abiding with another. For individuals who are estranged from others, relationships are dead. However, separation can be either physical or geographical but the awareness of an abiding presence can make relationships even more alive. The sense of *'being with'* is at the heart of intimacy. This is especially true of religious and clergy who move from place to place for change of assignment. While celibacy and separation can be considered partners, the same can be said of celibacy and estrangement. Separation is painful because it is at the very core of a love relationship.<sup>107</sup>

#### ❖ **Fasting For**

Fasting for answers the question *why* – why do you fast / give up something that is basically good. This is the *purpose*, the *motive*, or the *intention* of fasting or renunciation. It gives meaning and value to what is being fasted from.

Authentic fasting involves a healthy integration of the three important dimensions, namely, *fasting from*, *for* and *with* in order to nourish one's life, one's relationships, and one's sense of meaningfulness. This fasting for refers to the ultimate, transcendent goal or purpose that must sustain the way of celibacy.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., pp. 162-168.

From the Gospel of Luke 5:33-35, Jesus seems to be saying that fasting was unnecessary as long as the object of the fast was present. Relations and intimacy could be spontaneously or normally experienced by the disciples with the bridegroom (object of the fast) in their midst. When the bridegroom is gone, fasting becomes *sacramental action* to help the disciples remember that his presence could be sought in a more experiential way. Fasting in this context fosters the possibility of religious experience, thus, it becomes an *act of religion*. With this, its purpose is to help us to be mindful of our ultimate relationship with God.

The sign of *fidelity to the bridegroom* will be determined by *one's fidelity to prayer*. Hence, authentic celibacy does not only demand that we find ways of being warm and intimate but also that we provide and find a place, a room in our hearts only for God.<sup>108</sup>

### ❖ Fasting With

The voluntary choice of celibacy involves a degree of abstention from something good in favor of something we perceive to be better – at least in this individualistic, consumerist, and promiscuous culture. Here, we need some kind of community. Fasting from can affect us deeply. If we cannot share the effects of fasting for something, and if we cannot fast with others who have shared and who continue to share the same experience, celibacy can often become *solitary* instead of something for *solidarity*. We need to share our struggles, our hopes, our joys, and triumphs as celibates, to share who we are. If we cannot share in an atmosphere of trust and confidence, the needs which arise from who we are as celibates, mistrust and alienation can easily occur. This demands an environment for sharing of one's self, one's faith, and one's needs in a way that nourishes one's celibate life rather than undermines it.

As celibates living in a community, the community must become an oasis where everyone is refreshed, nourished, and developed by its life-giving water. When the community fails to be life-giving and growth-enhancing, whether knowingly or unknowingly, this experience will gradually eat away the energy from the members and their personal commitment will be affected. Celibacy needs nourishment more than life-support system.

Fasting with another or others does not just refer to one's community; it involves the way we relate with the one with whom we are intimate. This involves mutual disclosure and sharing,

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<sup>108</sup> Michael H. Crosby, *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart*, *ibid.*, pp. 169-176.

nurturing and correction, support and challenge. Mutual disclosure and sharing is to involve the other or others, in the deepest part of one's life stories and relationships. It must not remain at the level of *'what did you do?'* but *'how do you feel about that?'* and *'what do you think about it?'* It moves people beyond the surface to deal with the feelings of anger, fear, losses and disappointments. It celebrates each other's joys and hopes; their successes and dreams.<sup>109</sup>

*b. Religious Chastity As Renunciation Based on the Three Levels of Psychic Life*

There are renunciations involved in the choice of celibate chastity. Any choice in life demands renunciation. Christ says to each of us "If you want to be perfect, sell what you have, give it to the poor, deny yourself, come and follow me."<sup>110</sup>

What do we renounce as consecrated, chaste persons?

❖ *Psycho - Physiological Level*

We do not renounce our carnal being but only the means of expression and realization of this which are false according to our orientation. We renounce the ecstatic joy of physical intimacy, of sexual pleasure, or any gesture symbolic of or leading to sexual union. This includes kissing, holding hands, intimate physical postures, longing or seductive looks, touching or any physical act representative of the specialness and uniqueness of love which belongs in our case to Jesus. Although we do renounce sexual expressions, we do not renounce our sexuality: the manifestation of masculinity and femininity. For example: strength, delicateness, gentleness, sensitivity, warmth and tenderness in their proper context and meaning, are particular means to incarnate the tender heart of Christ.

❖ *Psycho - Social Level*

We renounce the intimate and faithful companionship of a beloved, the intimate complementarity of a man and a woman that brings inner security and joy in living. It involves the willingness to forego the joy of seeing personal love, physically as a personality, concretized in children. On this level, the religious does not renounce every friendship, but must subordinate it and integrate it with a strict interior vigilance, over his/her 'undivided love.' We renounce the

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<sup>109</sup> Michael H. Crosby, *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart*, *ibid.*, pp. 177-179.

<sup>110</sup> Matthew 19:21.

need for attention, concern and gratification of intimate presence, promises and consolations leading to exclusivity, genitality and married life.

❖ *Spiritual - Rational Level*

Chastity offers the religious a redemptive death. In renouncing marriage, spouse and children, we give to Christ our wish to be remembered in our offspring and by them. We renounce a faithful, unique, totally dedicated companion, a husband or a wife, with whom we can share our inmost being, who can assist us in our framework of intimate love and devotion to purify our values and plans in the area of sex and who has a special attention and thought for us. To choose Christ is a decision and this third level gives meaning to the other two. In all the three levels, we renounce not only the flesh but also the natural aspirations in our soul and spirit, and the possibility of obtaining and willing that earthly paradise of nature: mad-love between man and woman.

Living consecrated chastity demands perfect continence. It is a true holocaust, a gift of body and soul, and only a profound and daily living and experience of faith and of love can maintain equilibrium between the positive value of chastity and the negative aspects of renunciation so as to facilitate a fertile and holy chastity, a fertile / fecund and holy love.<sup>111</sup>

*c. Difficulties in Celibate Love*

❖ *Acceptance of one's limitations* – Accepting the limitations which celibacy places

on our love. Love between man and woman forcefully drives toward sharing genital pleasure. Celibate love requires not merely self-denial but a way of expressing love. It places limits on physical expression.

❖ *Separation* – Celibate love means many good-byes that leave the spirit twisted and torn and wondering how often it can endure such torture. It means aching / painful absences for long periods of time, perhaps with meager communication. It is painful because it strikes at the very core of a love relationship. Celibate love is a continual, mutual, intimate sharing, supporting, and caring between two people in friendship with affection. Separation interrupts that living together which is the essence of friendship.

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<sup>111</sup> Joyce Ridick, *Treasures in Earthen Vessels: The Vows*, ibid., pp. 53-55.

❖ It entails tensions to be borne, conflicts to be resolved, and hard choices to be made. Tensions, conflicts, and hard choices occur between a celibate's ideals and the feeling experienced in love between woman and man. To be loved is a gift or it is not being loved at all. We cannot dictate a gift, what it shall be or how it shall be wrapped.

❖ Celibates who experience love between man and woman will very likely at first be so fascinated by the loved one that they will be deaf to the call to give themselves generously to God in prayer and to others in human affection. Celibates' love must be inclusive not exclusive.<sup>112</sup>

### **Is human love a problem for religious celibates ?**

Actually, its occurrence may create problems but in itself, it is not a problem, but an awesome gift. To acknowledge, enjoy, and draw refreshment from the affection for and from others encountered in ministry is simply to accept a gift of God, his love in human form. Celibacy is a way of being human. Hence, it provides a place for many kinds of love. If the celibate is denying or suppressing those various kinds of affection for people in his/her life, she/he is very likely smothering affection in prayer, making it more trying and less satisfying.

Love is a delight in the presence of the other person and an affirming of his/her value and development as much as one's own. Love between man and woman is a mystery to be admired, revered, explored and treasured, not a problem to be analyzed, attacked, solved and set aside. The power of love to transform personality, vision and life, is awesome. The wonder of this celibate love and the beauty of this mystery can nourish prayer, intensify love of God and neighbor, and inspire more intelligent and firm celibate commitment.<sup>113</sup>

## **2. Religious Chastity as a Sign**

A sign ( according to the Webster dictionary ) is something material or external that indicates the presence or existence of something else. It signifies or points to a reality.<sup>114</sup> The vow of chastity is essentially a Christological, ecclesiological and eschatological sign:

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<sup>112</sup> Christopher Kiesling, *Celibacy, Prayer and Friendship: A Making-Sense-Out-of Life Approach*, ( New York: Alba House, Society of St. Paul, 1978 ), pp. 195-217.

<sup>113</sup> Christopher Kiesling, *Celibacy, Prayer and Friendship: A Making-Sense-Out-of Life Approach*, *ibid.*, pp. 149-159.

<sup>114</sup> *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*.

**1) Christological Sign** – Chastity is a profound love and imitation of Christ. As the life of Jesus was directed toward the proclamation of the presence and the coming of the Kingdom of God in a spirit of love and service (Agape), so are religious the light and salt of the world, towards the same end. He renounced physical, sexual gratification or intimate expression, and the companionship of a life partner. This must be our choice or way of life, too. Christ shows us in His celibate life a way of giving ourselves totally to the Kingdom ( Mt. 9:12 ).

Jesus also shows us the meaning of faith; a faith which must be expressed by a free action that God alone suffices; that God alone brings me to self-realization and fullness of life.

**2) Ecclesiological Sign** – Consecrated chastity is a sign of the Church. “It embraces and gives witness, in a visible way, to the Church’s relationship with Christ as spousal relationship of total oneness.”<sup>115</sup> Celibates who embraced consecrated chastity place themselves at the total service of the Church, at the service of Redemption, following the chaste and pure Christ whose love and service extends to all people. This undivided love, expressed concretely in apostolic mission, is not merely utilitarian: we do not make a vow of chastity so we can work more. We do make a vow of chastity in order that we may live more a life totally dependent on faith, hope and love. Our undivided love for Christ is a sacrament of Christ’s undivided love for the Church. Celibates in a special way, share in the Church's spousal relationship with Christ, by being exclusively set apart for Him.<sup>116</sup>

**3) Eschatological Sign** – Chastity is a reminder of our final end in eternity. It points to the eternal heavenly condition of human beings after their resurrection, when there will be no marriage and we shall be totally united to God as with a spouse. Chastity thus becomes a manifestation of the grace and the constant call to transcendence. It is also a manifestation of faith and hope in God; a belief that in the final reality we will be taken up into God where there’s no more weeping or gnashing of teeth; no emptiness or loneliness or unfulfilled desires, where there will be eternal communion and blessedness with the Father; where love will reign through consecrated chastity. Celibates live this already here on earth.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Anthony Malaviaratchi, *Initiation Into Religious Life*, *ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>116</sup> Anthony Malaviaratchi, *Initiation Into Religious Life*, *ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>117</sup> Joyce Ridick, *Treasures in Earthen Vessels: The Vows*, *ibid.*, pp. 50-52.

Religious are called to witness to the love and relatedness of God because God's new reign has caught up with people. It is not an eschatological sign reminding us that our true home is in heaven. It is a sign that God's love has struck root in our earthly and human condition.<sup>118</sup>

### **3. Uses and Abuses of the Vow of Chastity Based on the Three Levels of Self**

Consecrated chastity is an efficacious means of directing the spiritual and natural energies of the person for the Kingdom of God. Loving God unconditionally involves loving one's fellowmen. The goal of chastity is to bring the human nature to perfection in love: for religious, in the radical love of God. Freedom of heart means the release from egoism, in an integrated psyche that seeks God alone.

#### ***1) Psycho - Physiological Level.***

*a. Masturbation* - This genital self-stimulation produces pleasure, excitement, fullness, desire and warmth. The gravity of the act depends on the level of distortion of our nature.

- An isolated act of masturbation
- A habit / pattern of masturbation

How is masturbation a distortion? It is a distortion when the first level of our psychic being gains ascendancy/progress over the other two, especially over the third. The Church teaches that masturbation is a grave matter (Document on Sexual Ethics). If a habit has been established until adulthood, serious attempts should be made to overcome it. (Psychological help is needed).

Masturbation for an adult is a disorder. It is generally a manifestation of disintegrated non-sexual needs, which underlie the sexual symbolization. Scientific research indicates that for 17% of women and for 23% of men, sex in itself is a problem. The problem of masturbation may have some sources in the environment, but it is generally an intra-physical problem within the person - his/her unawareness or mishandling of other needs, which arise from within.

Masturbation may occur because of anger, fear, hurt, sadness, failure, or when another need is not gratified. Example when a need for dependency is not gratified, the person may, in anger and fear, seek gratification from oneself. Generally, people who regularly masturbate can be found to have difficulties in interpersonal relationships, in communicating, in trusting, in regulating time, interest and concern for others, in being or feeling accepted. If one knows her or his needs and the

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<sup>118</sup> Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Religious Life A Prophetic Vision: Hope and Promise for Tomorrow*, ibid., p. 134.

values of his/her vocation, and yet chooses it because of some inconsistencies between needs and values, to please oneself by stimulation, the seriousness of the offense increases.

*b) Physical Interaction ( Homosexual and Heterosexual Involvement )* - This can happen between a man and a woman, or between two men or two women. Any intimate physical expression must be renounced in celibate chastity - whether that is holding hands, kissing, or caressing. Such interaction between man-woman, woman-woman or man-man, on an intimate plane, has sexual connotations, no matter what rationalizations are offered, or in what close situations one finds himself / herself.

Reasons such as helping to overcome inhibitions, learning to trust, I need you, I need to relax, gratitude, sympathy, etc. are rationalizations since all these *needs* can be satisfied in another way, with means which are in keeping with the life-time promise one has made.

*Self-actualization* is not our goal but self-transcendence. Such action uses the other as object, not as person. It is to deny, remove from others the third human level and the level of grace which should be most operative in one's specific vocation. The same can be said of actions which involve the senses such as the eyes: looks of lust, prolonged looks of intensity, depths, seductiveness, searching, penetrating. The unconscious message of sexual desire is clear if both are honest enough to recognize it.

A good concrete criterion for evaluation can be: whatever act I engage in with the other in secret, would I be comfortable doing the same thing with him/her in the community room or refectory or in my community? Would it be objectively acceptable as such? The ultimate criterion is the degree of honest self-transcendent love of God that I am willing to live.

*c) Body Worship* - This can have two facets / extremes. There are those who are too pre-occupied to the detail about their body such as maintaining body figure by eating less; excess of sleep to avoid the appearance of eye bags; choosing a dress that reveals one's sexual beauty and youth, etc. or to impress and attract others especially those of the opposite sex. This can be body-egoism.

The other extreme is when a religious cares nothing about his/her body. He/she eats until her femininity or his masculinity is unrecognizable; trying to look filthy and miserable in dressing, not taking care of one's health or taking prescribed medicine when sick. Our body is God's gift to

us. We need to preserve, and take care of it as a way of praising and thanking the Lord and use it for God's service.

*d) Sexual Novels, Movies, Magazines* - Seeking pleasure in sexual novels, movies, magazines, TV shows, pornography. What is in question here is in making a "diet" of romances, with all their details and graphic descriptions and stimulating presentations; thus living a life of sexual pleasure, and seeking to participate in its effects.

## **2) Psycho - Social Level.**

This brings us to the topic of friendship: a particular type of psycho-social affective relationship, which is not only permissible but also encouraged as a genuine means of concretizing the love of God in us, and of self-transcendence. True friendship will indeed provide opportunities for transcendence since we need to accept everyone despite their limitations / weaknesses even when self-gratification is absent.

*Carol Wojtyla* ( now Pope John Paul II ) says that while the affective is necessary in relationships, the affective life should not become the driving force of our existence. It should not generate to the sensual, but be integrated into a plan of love.<sup>119</sup>

"A friendship is authentic when it becomes more and more an enrichment for fraternal life in community, besides for those who enjoy this friendship. This is the key point. Friendship is a great experience of love; if it is authentic, it strengthens the whole affective life of the consecrated. From a Christian point of view, you cannot love God, share in His universal love, without loving everything He loves, and tending to love it as much as He loves it infinitely. We cannot love the God of the people, without loving the people of God. Charity embraces everything."<sup>120</sup> God's love is inclusive; it excludes no one.

Both homosexual and heterosexual friendships need a certain degree of maturity on the part of those involved. This is possible in the life of the consecrated. Both must maintain an interior freedom, that is, their minds and hearts must be anchored in God.

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<sup>119</sup> Joyce Ridick, *Treasures in Earthen Vessels: The Vows*, ibid., pp. 58-63.

<sup>120</sup> John Thadathil, Handouts on *Evangelical Counsels and Consecrated Life*, ibid., p. 119.

a. Signs of Genuine Friendship

- A genuine friendship is immersed in God. God remains the first concern of each party in the friendship. He is their chief love. They would do nothing, absolutely nothing to displease or divide their hearts. This implies that each person is a man or woman of deep prayer. Religious and priests who do not really understand their vocation and love it deeply are hardly capable of celibate friendship.
- A growing commitment to the celibate gift. God is a God of fidelity and He expects fidelity from us. A beautiful friendship strengthens and perfects chastity. It prompts each party to want the celibate dedication more strongly and to be entirely faithful to it. It facilitates emotional and spiritual growth.
- Non-exclusiveness, non-possessiveness. It is true that universal love of the celibate does not mean that she/he does not love the individual persons. A deep friendship with one individual does not erase celibate universality.
- Genuine friendship promotes universal warmth. Each party finds that he/she goes out more warmly to all people.
- Authentic celibate friendship limits the frequency and length of visits. A man or woman or of prayer instinctively knows what is too much in the area of time spent together and what is too much in the area of signs of affection. Celibates who are too demonstrative in their affection and who spend too much time together soon have chastity problems.<sup>121</sup>
- Healthy friendship among celibates is non-genital. When celibate friendship deteriorates into genital behavior, the results are loss of self-esteem and guilt. It also indicates the lack of respect for each other's commitment and integrity.
- There is mutual appreciation and respect for each other's integrity. True friends appreciate and affirm each other. They also value the integrity and the reputation of the other. Each one does not take advantage or exploit his/her friend's weak points.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Thomas Dubay, "Celibate Friendship: Illusion and Reality," comps., *Readings on Psycho-Sexual Dynamics of Human Sexuality*, pp. 42-45.

<sup>122</sup> Philomena Agudo, *I Chose You*, *ibid.*, p. 124.

To be in love can be a temporary marvelous experience. The problem is not the feeling but the giving in; just as a person does not become a sinner when tempted but when she/he succumbs / gives in to it. It must be noted that physical conjugality can be avoided but one can still be profoundly psychologically conjoined and this can be a start of the betrayal of one's celibate chastity. The heart of the consecrated must remain available to all and must therefore avoid any kind of love that is too binding, too exclusive, and risk becoming an impediment to the universal mission of the consecrated person and to his/her availability for the Kingdom.

*b. Precautionary Measures for Those Who Are Too Emotionally Involved With Each Other. ( State of Falling In Love )*

- Try not to meet the other all alone especially in the hidden or dark place. It will be too difficult to speak only about pastoral activities or ministry.
- If it is necessary to meet the other one, try to meet in public, together with other people. Keep calm.
- Talk about the problem with your spiritual director, confessor, superior or best friend on whom you can rely and ask for help. You need to relieve your own feelings, relax and share your inner tensions with somebody. Don't keep it to yourself.
- Try to be patient with yourself. The affective life's storms need time to calm down. Don't rush to take decision. Ask for advice.
- Avoid frequent contacts with the person such as calls, visits and letters. Avoid too affective expressions.
- Learn to smile and laugh at yourself when your heart sometimes flutters faster.<sup>123</sup>

In short, the vow of chastity excludes sensible affectivity, which could lead to marriage. We need affective friendships too, warm, delicate and deep. But we need to integrate them and order them hierarchically in the levels of our being. Without prudence and self-control, freedom in loving is impossible.

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<sup>123</sup> John Thadathil, Handouts on *Evangelical Counsels and Consecrated Life*, *ibid.*, pp. 123-124.

### **3) *Spiritual - Rational Level.***

*a. Egoistic Withdrawal vs. Service* - Love and chastity imply involvement for the Kingdom which is concretized in loving service. But egoistic attitudes such as altruistic, self-transcendent ideals get crumpled into the little box of 'I', mine, me; my projects, my ideas, my creativity are the most important.

*b. Idealized, Intellectualized Distance* - Those who live in the world of ideas are often devoid of feelings and affectivity. They succumb to intellectual values, which are not congruent to the values of the servant of God, for they never lower themselves to love anyone but themselves.

*c. Involved, Serving, Spiritually Active for Selfish Reasons, Pride in Love* - Even values and declared spiritual ideas of love, community life and spiritual life can be used for egoistic ends. We can even use love itself to bolster our own pride: how good am I, not like the rest of them.<sup>124</sup>

## **4. Means to Grow in Chastity**

*1) Asceticism – Discipline* - Asceticism and discipline are very important in order to live a chaste and consecrated love by overcoming all forms of egoistic tendencies and subjective values. There is a necessity to strengthen our will and to integrate the different levels of our psychic life in the service of the will to love. This is to align our values to the values and spirit of Jesus Christ. Renunciation of one value is essential in order to grow into a higher one. Self-transcendence can allow us to find Him whom our hearts seek in all situations.

Pope Paul VI spoke of the asceticism needed for maturation of the personality. For the religious asceticism is more demanding. It consists in the deliberate and assiduous practice of those virtues needed in living out our promise and vows to God. Self-denial in the highest degree is an essential condition if one is to follow Christ.<sup>125</sup> “Asceticism by helping to master and correct the inclinations of human nature wounded by sin, is truly indispensable if consecrated persons are to maintain faithful to their own vocation and follow Jesus on the way of the cross.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Based on Joyce Ridick, *Treasures in Earthen Vessels: The Vows*, *ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>126</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 38.

2) **Prayer – Meditation** - “Prayer is the best weapon we can have against all sorts of temptations that beset us. In practice this involves great fidelity to liturgical and personal prayer, to periods devoted to mental prayer and contemplation, to Eucharistic adoration, to monthly retreats and to spiritual exercises.”<sup>127</sup> It is the lifeblood of our ministry and apostolate and a means of deepening one’s friendship with God. The Gospels are the best source of our meditation and prayer.

Our capacity to relate to the self and to others also determine the quality of our relationship with God. Prayer is a communication, which brings about a corresponding quality of relationship. So the quality of our relationship mirrors the quality of our prayer life.<sup>128</sup>

3) **Loneliness / Solitude** - Solitude and loneliness are indispensable elements in order to find oneself, integrate those aspects and levels of self which are troublesome, and have an identity, a personal identity in Christ which can be offered as gifts to others. Desert experiences lead a person into contact with the basic essential needs, values, attitudes of the self; they help confront a person with love and give time to work through a proper integration. We need the silence of solitude to be with our Spouse, to find the hurts and fears, the uncertainty and pain, as well as the joy and peace, desire and gratitude.<sup>129</sup> It is at the same time very therapeutic and a challenge to firmly / courageously face ourselves.

Solitude is the context and opportunity to assimilate and integrate what God is saying to me in both my prayer life and in my interaction with others. It is the moment of holding together diverse experiences, with their possibilities and contradictions, while awaiting the birth of new insight, new intuition, new challenge, and a new sense of being called forth in the service of the Kingdom.<sup>130</sup>

Furthermore, solitude and loneliness allow the religious to give space and time to “come home to oneself, to tune in to the God within, the source of our living water welling up in the heart.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Philomena Agudo, *I Chose You*, *ibid.*, pp. 209-210.

<sup>129</sup> Joyce Ridick, *Treasures in Earthen Vessels: The Vows*, *ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>130</sup> Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Religious Life A Prophetic Vision: Hope and Promise for Tomorrow*, *ibid.*, 137.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

**4) *Community Life*** - Chastity is practiced with greater security where a real sense of community flourishes in genuine fraternal love reciprocated by all the members. (cf. PC # 12). The community can offer to each religious selfless interest in his/her plans, concern for the person, a sense of belonging, of worth, of solidarity and security.

If there are failures in living the vow of chastity, particularly in friendships among our fellow religious, it would be good to look into our community living. Have we supported and loved the erring brothers / sisters instead of criticizing, alienating, or competing with them? <sup>132</sup>

Many religious today are struggling and desiring for a meaningful experience of community. Community is both a gift to be valued and shared; a task to be done. To have a harmonious and joyful community life, each member must put time and effort to create it. “Community is central to any form of religious life. Religious are intended to be experts in communion, witnesses and architects of the plan for unity.” <sup>133</sup>

Likewise, being essentially liminal, the task of religious community is to embody and articulate those values that deeply concern human life, most fundamentally the need to relate deeply and meaningfully with God, with people, with creation, and with life at large. Community life is a great support in being faithful to one’s celibate commitment. <sup>134</sup>

To actualize the gift of self, we need affirmation from our fellow members. We need emotional support. Religious life is livable only when we are assured of our community that is consistently supportive and loving. Community life when imbued with an affirming attitude, provides the healthy social network that makes fidelity possible. <sup>135</sup>

**5) *Examen*** - This is an honest evaluation of our needs, our egoistic trends and the needs which are dissonant with love. Can we identify our need and integrate it with our values? <sup>136</sup>

It is different from examination of conscience. Examination of conscience focuses on the moral aspect / dimension of a person’s life such as faults and sins committed during the day. Whereas, examen focuses on some critical questions and evaluation that challenge a person to change for the better, to employ ways and means to grow in love, in virtues, or in holiness by

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<sup>132</sup> Joyce Ridick, *Treasures in Earthen Vessels: The Vows*, *ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>133</sup> Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Religious Life A Prophetic Vision: Hope and Promise for Tomorrow*, *ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>135</sup> Philomena Agudo, *I Chose You*, *ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>136</sup> Joyce Ridick, *Treasures in Earthen Vessels: The Vows*, *ibid.*, p. 72.

confronting his/her ways of speaking, thinking, doing, and behaving if these are congruent to the Kingdom values. It is a way of re-assessing one's hierarchy of values.

**6) Service** - Service is love in action. It is a genuine way of renewing, preserving and augmenting one's love. It is a way of bringing the fruits of solitude back to try them in reality. It is also a test of our love. Living our vow of chastity is something serious, deep, and challenging. We can and should seek to respond to that challenge and in a renewed way, to love chastity as Christ loves, to surrender our body, our spiritual needs to intimacy to Him, to His heart, to enter into His love, to open and to abandon ourselves to it.<sup>137</sup>

### **7) Intimacy**

Intimacy does not end with the self but demands to be in relationship with *'the other'*. This type of meeting requires self-revelation, a knowing of the other and being known by the other at the deepest levels of being. To be intimate with another person requires a commitment of time, presence, and emotional energy.<sup>138</sup>

The need and desire for intimacy has become one of the major themes of the renewal of religious life and priesthood that has grown out of Vatican II. The pendulum has swung from a position of fear and suspicion regarding interpersonal relationships to one of acceptance of warm, supportive relationships as the norm.... The dictum 'go to God' without human interference has been replaced by an appreciation of the need for connectedness with others. Much time, effort, and money have been spent in an attempt to teach new ways of relating and to formulate structures of living and working that are more conducive to the establishment and maintenance of intimate relationships.<sup>139</sup>

## **5. Intimacy: A Healthy Way of Living the Vow of Chastity**

### **1) Definition of the Terms Used**

a. Celibacy - The embrace of the divinely offered gift inviting one to freely

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., pp. 68-73.

<sup>138</sup> Mary Elizabeth Kenel, "A Celibate's Sexuality and Intimacy," comps., *Readings on the Psycho-Sexual Dynamics of Human Sexuality*, p. 157.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

choose a life commitment of abstention from genital intimacy which expresses itself in an alternate intimacy with God and others. The celibate is a person who freely embraces the divine offer to refrain from genital intercourse, who finds ways to be warm and intimate with others and who gives primary place in his/her heart only to God.

b. Intimacy - The characteristic of a relationship of loving closeness, familiarity, and friendship that is marked by mutual disclosure, struggles with differences and trust. By definition, all intimacy is personal intimacy. Thus, this definition of intimacy implies personal intimacy.

c. Sexual Intimacy - The characteristic of a non-exploitative and non-genital relationship of loving closeness, familiarity, and friendship that is marked by mutual disclosure, struggles with differences, which is expressed in affection, gestures, and physical manifestation of care.

d. Celibate Intimacy - The characteristic of a relationship among people who have committed themselves to be non-genital in response to a divine gift, a relationship of loving closeness, familiarity, and friendship that is marked by mutual disclosure, struggles with differences, and trust which is expressed in affection, gestures, and physical manifestation of care.

e. Spousal Intimacy - The characteristic of a relationship of loving closeness, familiarity, and friendship that is marked by mutual disclosure, struggles with differences, and trust, and is expressed in affection, gesture, and physical manifestation of care between people who accept the responsibility involved in expressing their communion through genital intercourse in a permanent commitment.

f. Spiritual Intimacy - A relationship of loving closeness and personal familiarity with God that is expressed in compassion for others. At its core it is love-making ( God in us ) and making love (compassion for the world ).<sup>140</sup>

Embracing a celibate way of life does not mean blocking our God-given capacity to love. Instead, it enhances personal growth and fruitfulness; ennobles and purifies our capacity to love in an inclusive manner. It is not fear of intimacy but rather an invitation to grow more and be more like Christ, who developed intimacy with the Father. This is the purpose of consecrated chastity in celibacy: “to give one’s self exclusively to God, who in His Kingdom, offers Himself as the

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<sup>140</sup> Michael H. Crosby, *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart*, *ibid.*, p. 226.

fullness of love. To be gripped by that love necessarily means to give one's self to others, in love. Therefore, chastity liberates the human heart for God and all mankind.”<sup>141</sup>

It is a call to an intimate friendship with God. “Intimacy involves emotions and relationships. Authentic intimacy demands mutual disclosure as well as some vulnerability that involves giving up the need to control.”<sup>142</sup> A fear of intimacy has held celibates in a terrible isolation and loneliness. Often celibates have very few close personal relationships; we learn to live in a world of acquaintances. “All authentic friendships must be particular. The only thing that makes something potentially dangerous for a celibate is not when a friendship is particular, but when it becomes exclusive.”<sup>143</sup>

## ***2) Levels of Intimacy***

Exclusivity is the distinctive characteristic of a spousal intimacy / relationship. It is unlike the celibacy of Jesus, which is inclusive and which reaches out to those who are unloved, unloving and unlovable – the lonely of society. The latter kind of relationship must create a great resonance on the celibates' life.

There is emotional capacity in human beings, which can only be nurtured by warmth, friendship and tactility (touching, stroking, kissing); it is precisely when this dimension is neglected that sexual problems surface, that the need for genital gratification becomes inflated, in celibates and married people alike. A celibacy that denies basic human needs belies the incarnational dignity of human life, the supreme and spiritual challenge of Trinitarian love, and turns celibacy into an ascetical monstrosity.<sup>144</sup>

Let us discuss a bit in detail how these friendship and intimacy ennoble the life of the consecrated celibates by focusing our attention to the levels of intimacy. This discussion shows the dynamic interplay among the different levels.

a.     *Personal Intimacy* – As a person I need an identity, an awareness of who I am and how I am different from other individuals who are persons. There are factors that help me

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<sup>141</sup> Anthony Malavariatchi, *Initiation Into Religious Life*, *ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>142</sup> Michael H. Crosby, *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart*, *ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>143</sup> Michael H. Crosby, *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart*, *ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>144</sup> Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Religious Life A Prophetic Vision: Hope and Promise for Tomorrow*, *ibid.*, pp. 132-

discover my personal identity and these originate in and are affected by my family of origin, socio-economic factors, culture, and religious dimensions. To become an authentic person involves discerning one's identity; identity and intimacy are deeply connected.

Achieving intimacy is impossible in a dynamic defined by individualism, isolation, and institutionalization. Rather, intimacy involves the fullest meaning of relationships, something grounded in authentic communication and communion among persons.

The reality that distinguishes a human person from a human individual is intimacy. This involves mutual relationships defined by **self-acceptance**, **self-disclosure**, and **self-sharing**. Some say that one cannot have identity without experiences of intimacy. Others say intimacy defines authentic identity.

*Erik Erickson* found intimacy to be the task of discovering one's identity. For him there is no chance to be intimate with another if I do not discover my own identity and become at ease with it.

According to *Mary Elizabeth Kenel*, in the process of learning to be intimate, one must first acquire intimacy with one's own self, growing to an awareness and appreciation of one's own identity, uniqueness, and value as a person. To achieve this, it is essential to recognize the true authentic self, the real me, than maintain a view distorted by the denial or repression of essential elements. Only in relationship can we be open to the possibility of intimacy. To know I am who am, I need to be in relationship with others who can also say I am who am.<sup>145</sup>

*b. Sexual Intimacy* – As individuals, we are either male or female. Our personal lives are sexual by nature. However, our sexual identity goes beyond this identification. It does not only involve biological sex and gender, the social roles and functions which the culture associates with sexual identity but it identifies my 'I am' in some sexual way that involves attraction to the 'I am' of the other persons.

Sexual intimacy is built on personal intimacy. When these two dimensions are integrated, one can be an individual who is personal and at the same time a male or female who is sexual.

*Mary Elizabeth Kenel* says that before such integration can be achieved, there must be an awareness and acceptance of the self as a sexual person, a thought that creates so much anxiety that some people completely repress the sexual dimension of their lives. They fail to appreciate

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<sup>145</sup> Michael H. Crosby, *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart*, *ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

that human sexuality as a healthy and positive aspect of personality that has a broad diffuse expression in all areas of living. In their efforts to remain separated from sexuality, repressed persons allow it to assume a role of major importance in their lives as they become obsessed with sex as a starving individual focuses on food. What is even more insidious is that the sexual, emotional detachment of the repressed religious or priest is often mistaken for spiritual detachment.

Men view friendship different from women. Example, men see friendship in its more Aristotelian sense of being useful for each other, enjoying one another, and having some common goals that create a bond. Women stress connectedness, belonging, continuity, trust, and security.

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*b. Spousal and Celibate Intimacy* – Marriage and consecrated celibacy / chastity are two complementary forms of Christian life. Both require intimacy and both are also characterized by a need for commitment. For married people, the kind of intimacy requires a commitment to one person or life-long partner and it involves genital intimacy. Likewise, consecrated celibates also require a life-long commitment to God and the kind of intimacy is non-genital.

### **Levels of Intimacy**

#### ***Bodily Dimension***

Individual  
Male / Female  
Genital / Non-Genital

#### ***Relational Dimension***

Personal  
Sexual  
Spousal / Celibate

People can be genital without intimacy or vice-versa. Also, just because one is non-genital does not mean that one is intimate. Intimate love need not be genital, therefore consecrated celibates can have intimate love without being genital. Here, I would like to elaborate more on celibate intimacy.

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<sup>146</sup> Michael H. Crosby, *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart*, *ibid.*, p. 148.

### *Celibate Intimacy*

Before going deeper into the discussion of this topic, two significant questions must be asked.

- ◆ Is it possible for a religious / vowed person to love deeply and intimately while remaining chaste and celibate?
- ◆ Can deep love and friendship between vowed people of the same / opposite sex co-exist with chastity and celibacy?

Loving intimacy is not restricted to marriage. All forms of Christian life, all human beings, friendship and interpersonal relationships are the core and center of human life. Authentic celibate intimacy can only be experienced or expressed when one's life is grounded in relationships that are conducive of personal intimacy and sexual intimacy. Without the first two kinds of intimacy, one will resort to genitality devoid of authentic intimacy, the genitality would be without commitment.

Friendship and intimacy are extensions of our contemplative prayer. As mystical contemplation leads to human authenticity so does mystical friendship; as mystical contemplation leads to self-transcendence so also does mystical friendship.<sup>147</sup>

It is undeniable that consecrated celibates who are called to be *prophetic witnesses* and signs of *contemplative presence* in the world need to develop a healthy friendship. Friendship and intimacy are very important factors to personal, sexual, spousal / celibate, and spiritual growth and fulfillment. The capacity for spiritual closeness / intimacy is linked with the capacity to love. To find fulfillment in the consecrated celibate life, one must grow in spiritual intimacy with a significant other, as well as in God. When the individual is incapable of spiritual intimacy, he/she compensates by indulging in genital gratification.<sup>148</sup> “Friendship deepens the capacity to love and enhances spiritual life. Seeing God in faith, in the heart of a friend is the foundation of spiritual intimacy in friendship. Emotional maturity however, is an indispensable element in spiritual intimacy.”<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> William Johnston, *Being In Love: The Practice of Christian Prayer*, (Pasay City, Philippines: St. Paul Publication, 1990), p. 138.

<sup>148</sup> Philomena Agudo, *I Chose You*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, a well-known author supports the idea of the celibates' need for friendship and intimacy since these two are fundamentally human emotional needs.

Consecrated celibacy assumes a new ambience in our time, namely, the redemption of life-giving intimacy. This involves a growth in acceptance, warmth, closeness, and empathy with both God and people. For a liminal witness, a celibacy out of tune with the human capacity for intimacy loses credibility. It must remain close to the longings of the human heart and articulate these in a manner that awakens and fulfills people's deepest desires.<sup>150</sup>

Celibate intimacy with another or with others represents personal relationship of trust and loyalty that generates the kind of caring commitment characteristic of friendship. This kind of caring attitude involves **self-awareness** ( personal dimension ), **self-disclosure** ( relational dimension ), **self-entrustment** ( trust / loyalty component ), and **self-donation** ( commitment component ).<sup>151</sup> See illustration below:

<b>Levels of Intimacy</b>	<b>Self – Centering</b>	<b>Goals for Search</b>	<b>Levels of Faith</b>
Personal	Self-awareness	Search for Authenticity	Personal
	Self-disclosure	Search for Mutuality	Relational
Sexual	Self-entrustment	Search for a Friend	Trust / Loyalty
Celibate	Self-donation	Search for a Cause	Commitment <sup>152</sup>

We have already discussed the levels of intimacy namely, the personal, sexual, spousal / celibate and spiritual. It is clear that as the celibates progress in the level of intimacy, it shows that the latter is grounded upon the former level.

### **Self-Centering**

Here, we will focus on the levels of self-centering which includes self-awareness and self-disclosure ( personal ), self-entrustment ( sexual ), and self-donation ( spousal / celibate ).

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<sup>150</sup> Diarmuid O' Murchu, *Poverty, Celibacy, and Obedience*, ibid., p. 132.

<sup>151</sup> Michael H. Crosby, *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart*, ibid., pp. 156-157.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

To trust in oneself begins with self-awareness or self-knowledge. In the face of other voices saying something is wrong with us, the inner voice of self-awareness enables us to believe in ourselves as good, as precious in the eyes of God. This self-awareness / self-disclosure enables us to become authentic to ourselves. The increasing level of mutuality enables us to move to self-disclosure.

The third level is self-entrustment. People reach the level of self-entrustment when they have strong enough experiences of mutuality in relationships. The *self* that is disclosed is so vulnerable and honest that it is disclosed only because the environment has been created within the other can be trusted not to violate the disclosure. At this level, the trusted person says to the one who made the self-entrustment: *'Thank you for trusting me.'* The sense of gratitude and awe at being honored with the trust of another often testifies to the fact that an underlying environment already had been created that allowed self-entrustment to take place.

The **self**, to be authentic, must be de-centered from the false self if one's identity is to be realized. This de-centering can only come through *self-giving* or *self-donation*. De-centering does not come without trust. We can risk our self for the sake of the other.

### **Goals for Search**

Self-knowledge is very important in the process of arriving at authenticity. The effort towards self-awareness represents the search for authenticity. It reveals the desire of the self to discover an identity, to be someone who is self-defined. *'I am who am'*.

Self-disclosure is a movement towards saying 'I am' in relationship to another. This disclosure reveals the risk I take to be who I am in mutuality with the 'I am' represented in the other. This self-disclosure represents our *search for mutuality*. Search for a friend is a movement towards entrusting to the other my deepest self, who 'I am', wherein I reveal my need to fulfill my personal search for meaning; the search to find friendship through a kind of mutuality which enables me to maintain my own authenticity. Now, I can be open to the possibility of giving myself to the other. **Self-donation** leads to a person's search for a cause. The personal search for a cause reflects Jesus' words in John's Gospel about the person's willingness to lay down his life for his friends. The commitment represented in the self-donation represents the peak of faith. One cannot live a truly celibate life without having faith in someone or something bigger than the self – *'the Reign of God'*.

### Levels of Faith

Every crisis of trust invites us to examine or re-examine our faith. Faith involves a personal relationship of trust and loyalty to someone, some values, etc. that leads to commitment. We don't make commitment to persons or institutions we mistrust. We can't trust persons or institutions that have abused our relationships. Commitments on the other hand, can nourish trust and loyalty and support personal relationships. The crisis of trust among communities and institutions is the result of crisis in our personal relationships, too. There is also a crisis of intimacy.<sup>153</sup>

*d) Spiritual Intimacy* - An authentic celibate is the person who knows how to make love in the fullest spiritual sense of the term. The truly celibate person is the one who is a maker of love, even if she or he had never had a genital experience. Making love involves sharing myself with another in ways that are reciprocated. On the personal and sexual levels, the celibate is pledged to a non-exclusive, non-genital commitment of care.

Spiritual intimacy is a relationship of loving closeness and personal familiarity with God that is expressed in compassion for others. At its core, it is **love-making** ( God in us ) and **making-love** (compassion for the world ).

As a sexual person, the fact that I am naturally attracted to some others reveal the natural attraction of the Persons of the Trinity for each other, to find one's 'I am' in the embrace of the other 'Thou'. Spiritual and sexual life interact and mature together.

From the faith perspective, it should be clear that in all three levels of personal, sexual and spousal/celibate intimacy, the assumption is that **spiritual intimacy gives meaning to each dimension**. I can truly be an image of God, who is love, if I am able to experience and dwell in love. What makes me spiritual as a celibate is that I do not spiritualize my relationships in the sense of ignoring the reality that I am a sexual person. Rather, I am able to be intimate as a celibate precisely because I have discovered non-manipulative ways of being personally and sexually intimate with others. This is what makes me celibate and spiritual. It is the meeting point of celibacy and spirituality in a sexually-embodied person. Spirituality is what enables me as a

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<sup>153</sup> Michael H. Crosby, *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart*, *ibid.*, pp. 201-207.

celibate to make love in a non-genital way. Like Jesus, His way of loving and of relating (making love) is the only authentic way to be spiritual and celibate.<sup>154</sup>

Spiritual intimacy is based on love, esteem, and respect for the other. A spiritual bond is established to make the relationship a source of comfort and support. There is a sincere respect for each other's integrity, and a sincere concern for each other.<sup>155</sup>

Any relationship is qualified to be authentic when it is grounded on one's relationship with the Persons of the Holy Trinity who is the source of love, oneness, respect, and intimacy. The Trinity is the archetypal model of any authentic relationship wherein each Person has developed and achieved a sense of identity and inner unity. Primary to the development of friendship and intimacy, if it is life-fulfilling and growth-enhancing, is the respectful acceptance and appreciation of each other's identity and uniqueness.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., pp. 157-158.

<sup>155</sup> Philomena Agudo, *I Chose You*, p. 122.

### Highlights on the Vow of Chastity

- ◆ The old understanding of chastity explicitly or implicitly involves a negative attitude toward sexuality and a denigration of marriage as a Christian vocation. It is often seen today as characterized by *fear*, *guilt* and *repression* leading to serious affective underdevelopment in many religious.
- ◆ The contemporary reflection focuses on the importance of *sexuality* in human life and the irreplaceable role in affective growth of *friendship* with members of one's own and the other sex. This has led to a serious revision of both the theology and practice of religious chastity.
- ◆ It is not merely viewed as renunciation of marriage but as a *commitment to growth in love* dedicated to the development of a world characterized by *unselfish service* and *mutual care*.
- ◆ The person who vows celibacy / chastity for evangelical reasons has to contribute to the transformation of a basically one sex, male-dominated society / church to a *two-sex society* characterized by *responsible mutuality*. The struggle for the liberation and equal rights of women. It is to foster the emergence of women as equal collaborators in every sphere of life and work.
- ◆ The prophetic role of the religious in the affective transformation of society must spring from their *personal affective transformation*. Intimacy with people of the same / opposite sex remains an unfamiliar territory for many religious. Much of the affective energy which was sublimated into compulsive work for so many years is hard to tap for the development of loving relationships with other individuals and within community.
- ◆ To be evangelically prophetic, religious must have a *deep religious experience of being loved by God* in Jesus and an experience of *personal fulfillment in returning that love*.
- ◆ The Gospel purity of heart which religious can bring to the effective transformation of the world and the Church is the expression in interpersonal and community relationships that has

been radically healed, purified, and liberated in the intimacy of a *profound personal* and *communal prayer life*.

- ◆ It allows the religious to participate meaningfully in the emergence of a new, whole, and loving world characterized by *equality, responsible intimacy, and mutuality*.
- ◆ It is *not simply a sexual denial* but a *total commitment to becoming* an ever more loving human being and a commitment to the creation of a genuine world community.
- ◆ It is the only vow whose content has been a *constant factor* in all forms of religious life throughout history.
- ◆ A call to consecrated celibacy is a *mystical absorption* of one's life in the mystery of Christ.
- ◆ It is the only one of the three traditional vows whose object is, strictly speaking, an *evangelical counsel* in the sense that it is a response to an invitation not addressed to all Christians. It is the defining characteristic of religious life.

## CONCLUSION

### PRAYER FOR THE GIFT OF CHASTITY

*Lord Jesus, I ask you humbly for new grace, for a great increase in the charism of consecrated chastity.*

In virtue of your own risen and glorified sexuality, heal me in my own sexuality. Make the rough way smooth and the crooked ways straight.

*Heal me in the whole area of my affectivity, of my capacity to love and to receive love. Teach me your ways, and make me grow in my capacity to love you and to love others, to receive your love and to receive the love of others.*

*In every Holy Communion, consecrate my whole self to you by your body, broken on the cross for me and risen for my salvation. Heal me by your five wounds that you still carry for me, and make me whole.*

*Give me, Lord, your Holy Spirit, and pour out in me your gift of consecrated chastity.*  
*Amen.*

**Robert Faricy**

## CUESTION FOR REFLECTION AND TERM PAPER

The students are expected to submit a **research paper containing 5-8 pages**, single-spaced and included in it is a one page personal reflection regarding the chosen topic and the list of bibliography. Choose one from the given questions.

- a) What are some contemporary issues and challenges of the Vow of Chastity? How do religious respond to these challenges?
- b) What do you think is the greatest contribution that the religious vowed to chastity can offer to the world? to the Church? Justify your answer.
- c) How is chastity contextualized in your culture? in your Rule and Constitution?
- d) What is the significance of sexuality, intimacy, and friendship in the new understanding of the vow of chastity?
- e) What is the significance of the contemplative dimension of chastity in today's world characterized by noise and pollution?