

# CELIBACY, AFFECTIVITY AND FRIENDSHIP

By BERNARD J. BUSH

I RECENTLY attended a lecture by R. D. Laing, the famous iconoclastic psychiatrist, who has been quoted as saying, 'schizophrenia is a sane response to an insane world'. I expected a lively evening in which the psychiatric establishment would take a thumping for its various pomposities and presumptuousness. What a surprise I got. About 400 or 500 people, mostly mental health professionals from the San Francisco Bay area were treated to an extended homily on how we experience God through our transpersonal collective unconscious. It sounded very much like a natural theology with a proof for the existence of God from psychological experience. He said, 'The more we become appraised of its presence, the more we are happy. The more we are estranged, the more we become preoccupied with our own particular interests and are miserable'.

In my professional work, I am the director of the House of Affirmation in Montara, California. It is a residential treatment centre for emotionally and mentally troubled clergy and religious.<sup>1</sup> It was founded by Sister Anna Polcino and Father Thomas A. Kane, in 1971, in Worcester, Massachusetts, largely as a response to the fact that the psychological profession generally was at best neutral, and at worst positively antagonistic to religious values. As my recent experience with Laing illustrates, all that is changing. More and more theorists in the field are exploring the further reaches of the human potential. Instead of concentrating exclusively on psychopathology and illness, they are asking what it means to be a truly healthy human being. In looking for models, they are re-discovering the saints. Moreover, these thinkers are keenly interested in what mental and spiritual practices effect such integration, and how the experience of transcendent wholeness can be achieved. Thus, R. D. Laing, in common with a growing number of the psychological profession, see human integration as a co-operative relationship between the conscious and the unconscious within each person. He spoke of the unconscious as the 'unbeknownst', declaring that it is shrouded in darkness to us, yet has us in its grasp, and that we become aware of its presence by 'listening to the silence of our hearts'. He further went on to say that this all-encompassing intelligent reality exists in a different state from that which is

correlated to our consciousness (that is, rational mind). He is speaking of living in awareness of mystery.<sup>2</sup> I never expected to be challenged by psychiatrists to look at my spiritual life. Can it be that the stones are crying out (Lk 19,40)?

So far I have discussed the fact that the psychological profession is coming to understand and proclaim a reality that we have known all along; that we are not fully alive as human beings until we become one within ourselves, until we reconcile and integrate the internal polarities we carry. Here I want to consider the need for our conscious and unconscious, the masculine and feminine aspects of our psyche to be in harmony. It is precisely through the human experience of incompleteness that we are driven to strive for unification through loving relationships. God made us this way, because God is made in this way. It is the same dynamism that exists in the Trinity. The persons exist in relation to each other, and are bound together by love.

The usual way that humans complete themselves is through the unity of a man and a woman in marriage. Their sexual complementarity is the sacrament of the union of Christ and his Church (Eph 5,32). The infatuation stage of falling in love is usually the first stage of the process of growth toward integration. In some way, the experience of infatuation is a kind of narcissism.<sup>3</sup> The lover actually sees his own opposite sex side reflected in the beloved and falls in love with the image of his own *anima*.<sup>4</sup> The maxim that love is blind describes this common experience. Mature love grows as the projections — along with the attendant unrealistic expectations — are withdrawn, and the other is loved in truth for who he or she is, realistically. It is at this point that the person can find the complementary sex within himself or herself, and become a whole person who is able to relate lovingly to another whole person and be loved in return. Carl Jung calls this the process of individuation, the unification of ego (consciousness) and the self (the archetypal images common to all people of all ages, hence, the collective unconscious). It is the process each person must go through if he or she is to achieve maturity, wholeness, integration, sanctity. These polarities are similarly expressed theologically as the I and the Christ who lives in me, or the individual and the Mystical Body.

The issue of growth is the life-long process of becoming whole within oneself, of reconciling the polarities, of achieving integration, oneness. I am describing the process of achieving a stable personal identity. Now in this life, the most important dimension of identity is sexual identity. I am a man and everything I do is permeated by my masculinity. Yet I only came to know what it means to be a man in comparison with other men and by contrast to women.<sup>5</sup> It is

paradoxical that throughout life it is through the polarization of the sexes that I come to appreciate the other as such, including the otherness of a loving personal God. Only then can I enter into a loving relationship with the other which effects the reconciliation and unity of the two sexual poles both within myself personally, and with others. The celibate has pledged to enter the maturing process of individuation in a celibate way and thus to achieve the common human destiny. The celibate believes that he or she has been called and graced by God to witness to the presence in this world of the unifying and integrating power of God's love directly, by-passing the usual conjugal way. Gerard Fourez in his excellent booklet on the evangelical life and celibacy speaks of the need for a sense of urgency and passion for the sake of the gospel, of loving intensely and not settling down. He says that, 'Religious are not celibate in order to lead quiet, tranquil lives in the midst of a good religious family'.<sup>6</sup> The secular clergy, while their celibacy is clearly not of the essence of priesthood as it is of the essence of religious life, nevertheless are bound to the same sense of urgency for the sake of the gospel as religious. As such, they have available through the Church the grace to grow to maturity and holiness in a celibate life and thus witness to the compelling love of Christ.

There are many whose voices should be taken with utmost seriousness who would dispute that claim and assert that the grace of celibacy is simply not available to all priests through the Church. They say, and I think with considerable validity, that there are many men and women in the Latin Church who are called to *both* priesthood *and* marriage. It is not the purpose or scope of this paper to discuss the issue of celibacy as such. The current reality is that with a few exceptions, celibacy is a requirement of the Church for its priests. Nevertheless, it is certain that expectations and exhortations are not usually enough to support a celibate commitment in the absence of other personal, spiritual, and structural supports. It is also true that the living situation of many priests is deplorable and hardly conducive to a vital life of celibacy.

The usual path of personal integration and maturation is through the sexual union of men and women in marriage. This integration can also be achieved in the celibate state. However, even for the celibate, there is still a need for a loving relationship with the opposite sex. This opposite sex can be a person, or it can be found within as the *anima* through meditation, dreams, active imagination, contemplative prayer, and mystical experiences, all of which are guides and means for the inward pilgrimage. In my experience, successful integration of all the dimensions of personhood requires both close personal relationships and spiritual reflection on inner

experiences. In any case, without a commitment to the inner journey of self-discovery and approach to God, celibacy will be quite sterile and destructive of the person since he or she will then remain locked into a superficial existence. Whenever clergy are experienced as chauvinistic, and either fearful or hostile toward women, there is evidence of such immature superficiality and a lack of sexual integration. Such hostility is usually evidence of a projection of one's own feared *anima*, the feminine within. Paradoxically, rejection of women is essentially self-rejection, just as infatuation is narcissistic. Women who are hostile to men suffer in a similar way.

What this means for a man is that he must become aware of, and deeply appreciate his feminine mode of consciousness. Most of us are very uncomfortable with this experience as the intuitive nature of the cognition seems to us irrational and emotional. It feels as if our hearts are carrying our heads away, not a very 'masculine' way to behave! We must, first and foremost, as Fourez so rightly points out, make a decision to love and give ourselves permission to feel. He adds:

An evaluation of the possible rationales for institutionalized celibacy does not imply that a completely satisfying theory of celibacy is necessary or even possible. It is never really possible to intellectualize completely those many layers of human experience which lie deep within us: love, friendship, responsibility, and care cannot be expressed completely in rational patterns.<sup>7</sup>

The feminine mode of consciousness is unitive in that it serves to integrate rather than analyse. In personal relationships, the integration is felt as compassion, tenderness, empathy, patience and the ability simply to listen unjudgementally. Speaking for myself, I find that I need to control my logical, superrational side in order to be truly present to someone. Loving attentiveness to the other comes from my feminine side. I learned it from the men and women who have loved me in that way, and I have changed because of it. I have grown more emotionally, personally, and spiritually when I was loved and accepted, than when I was judged or criticized. I trust this is true of most of us. In any case, this is an experience of the *anima* in its complementary function, whether it is a woman loving me into change or whether it is my interior feminine telling me to be gentle and patient with myself.

It seems to me that to be called to the celibate priesthood means being called to strive toward an extraordinary degree of maturity, and to be available with this integrated love for all God's people. The married are not called to the same type of generalized

availability. Fourez notes with respect to married and celibate availability:

When one has a friendship with a married person he soon realizes that this friendship will always be secondary and subordinate to those bonds which consolidate the married person's own family. When a person has a friendship with a celibate for the Kingdom, there is a possibility of a much different kind of availability because one knows that the celibate is not bound to a particular family either affectively or practically.<sup>8</sup>

Psychic and apostolic availability in no way precludes the possibility of intense life-enhancing personal friendships. In fact, precisely the opposite is true.

There are many articles and books on celibacy and how to live it. Many are critical of the Church's insistence on celibacy for its priests. Some describe the dangers and precautions necessary in love relationships between celibates, and go into detail about the stages of friendship and different kinds of love. Some emphasize the sociological and counter-cultural dimension of celibacy. Others describe celibacy mainly as a witness to Christ-like sacrificial love. Legrand<sup>9</sup> and Keane<sup>10</sup> dwell extensively on the eschatological meaning of virginity and celibacy. Legrand particularly explores and shows why marriage is a sacrament while consecrated virginity and celibacy is not, and explains how celibates live now in Christ as all will live one day. On the other hand we have Father Pable saying, 'The most powerful witness of celibacy, it seems to me, is not eschatological but incarnational'.<sup>11</sup> Whatever the point of view or emphasis, it is crucially important that we read extensively in the area of sexuality and celibacy, and contemplate prayerfully its meaning. Otherwise it will have no meaning, and no one can long live a personal absurdity. We must each search out all the possibilities for living this life-style and find the rationales that make the most sense to each of us personally. What motivates one person may not appeal at all to another. Celibate sexuality is always by its nature relational and communicative. It is important to know how I am relating and what I am communicating. As Father Thomas Kane states, 'It is my hope that the priest today, by the way he lives, sees himself as one who is a pilgrim in the area of growth and development. Adult living is difficult work and the priesthood of today and tomorrow is an "adults only" society'.<sup>12</sup>

Adding to the difficulties of integrating our polarities is the fact that the feminine and masculine are not co-equal in our culture. There is a great danger in the one-sided masculinization of the Church and of the world. Rationality, science, technology, competition,

and consumer manipulation dominate our society and culture. M. Esther Harding describes the condition thus from a woman's point of view:

In western patriarchal society, during many centuries, man was concerned to be dominant and superior, while woman was relegated to a position of dependence and inferiority. Consequently the feminine principle has not been adequately recognized or valued in our culture. And even today, when the other manifestations of this one-sidedness have undergone considerable change, the psychological effects persist and both men and women suffer from a maiming of the psyche, which should be whole.<sup>13</sup>

This undervaluing of the feminine principle is seriously present in the Church with its celibate male clergy, but not exclusively so. It is also characteristic of the world of commerce, government, the military, medicine, the media, higher education and so forth. All the major opinion-shaping systems of our culture are male dominated. Evidently marriage is no guarantee that the influence of the feminine will be present in the world.

The point is that we celibate priests are being challenged to incorporate the feminine way of perceiving into our lives and ministry which will be the more Christ-like for it. Ann Ulanov speaks eloquently about the religious contemplative function of the feminine:

The feminine above all has a completing function. It opens up areas in which the spirit makes us holy by making us whole. In contrast to the goals of the masculine style of consciousness — goals of intellectual perfection, clear focus, and specialization — the feminine style of consciousness moves toward completeness. The feminine style of spirit is to make progress on a downward-going road, into the dark, into the roots of earth, into the unconscious. It is a style that does not exclude in order to purify, as does the masculine, but instead embraces all elements in order to redeem.<sup>14</sup>

Christ is the only one who has actually 'embraced all elements in order to redeem'. He is the high priest whose sacrifice and resurrection enabled him to incorporate all of estranged creation and present it back to the Father. Thus the priestly action is essentially a reconciling action. All priests who represent Christ must also be reconcilers and healers of the divisions that exist in people's souls and hearts — starting with our own. The basic division is that of sin, the split between humanity and God. In psychological terms it is the split between the false, selfish ego and the true self, the 'unbeknownst' which is the person of Christ, the Mystical Body. We

experience this split acutely in the division, attraction, fascination, and fear between the internal masculine and feminine polarities and between men and women. We celibates are called on to heal that division with the only power that can effect the union, God's Spirit of love. We experience the union through the loving conversation which keeps all channels of communication open between people and between the various parts of our own inner lives.

As I mentioned in the beginning with reference to the observations of R. D. Laing, the psychologists are beginning to tell us what constitutes the goal of humanity. They are telling us what we already know, but perhaps have forgotten. Consider these amazing reflections from Carl Jung. They are introduced by June Singer with this observation, 'Jung studiously compares in all details the . . . sacrifice of the Mass, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. At last he comes to this interpretation:

Looked at from the psychological standpoint, Christ . . . represents a totality which surpasses and includes ordinary man, and which corresponds to the total personality that transcends consciousness. We have called this personality the 'self' . . . the mystery of the Eucharist transforms the soul of the empirical man, who is only a part of himself, into his totality, symbolically expressed by Christ. In this sense, therefore, we can speak of the Mass as *the rite of the individuation process*.<sup>15</sup>

The priest who celebrates the 'rite of the individuation process' should himself be growing toward individuation through mystical union with Christ. This sacramental configuration of the priest to Christ shows through a man who has 'lost his life', i.e. his particular self-preoccupations, including a wife and family, and now 'lives in Christ'; that is, he loves with a universal yet intensely personal and passionate love of others.<sup>16</sup>

I would like to offer a quotation from Karl Rahner, expressing the great difficulty he had in writing about celibacy. In his open letter to diocesan priests on celibacy, he complains about his effort in these words:

I myself am dissatisfied with this letter. It does not make clear what the renouncing marriage out of faith, hope and love for God . . . *and* for man really means. But perhaps after all you will see what lies behind words that are at once too simple and too complicated. Perhaps when one would speak of the elemental, abysmal things of life — especially things 'hidden' in Christ — all one can do is work round the edges of mystery, stammering in this way.<sup>17</sup>

So once again we are faced with the venture into the non-rational, the intuitive, the 'unbeknownst'. It is a risky venture since it means

allowing our sexuality to be lived through mystery in order to experience that freedom of those who have nothing more to lose since they have already given it all away for the sake of identifying with Christ. There is something here also of putting the hand to the plough and not looking back. Perhaps more to the point, we are to be like the wise virgins, waiting with plenty of oil (lots of mutual love, support, and encouragement) for the return of the master.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cf my article, 'Healing Grace', in *The Way*, vol 16 (July 1976), pp 189-98.

<sup>2</sup> Cf for example, the recent very popular book by M. Scott Peck, M.D.: *The Road less travelled* (New York, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent treatment of the spiritual meaning of the infatuation experience, cf Thomas J. Tyrrell: *Urgent longings: reflections on the experience of infatuation, human intimacy, and contemplative love* (Whitinsville, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Cf Harding, M. Esther: *The way of all women* (New York, 1970), pp 129-30.

<sup>5</sup> There is an abundant and rapidly growing literature in the area of feminine psychology. It is good for men to read it to get a sense of the characteristics of their own feminine side. Particularly useful in my opinion are the works from the Jungian tradition. In addition to other works cited in this article, cf Castillejo, Irene Claremont de: *Knowing woman* (New York, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> Fourez, Gerard: *A light grasp on life: an essay on the evangelical life and celibacy* (Abington, 1973), p 17. This booklet is an excellent treatment of the subject in its psychological, sociological, spiritual and moral aspects.

<sup>7</sup> Fourez, Gerard: *op cit.*, p 23.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p 16.

<sup>9</sup> Legrand, Lucien: *The biblical doctrine of virginity* (New York, 1963).

<sup>10</sup> Keane, S. S., Philip, S.: 'The meaning and functioning of sexuality in the lives of celibates and virgins', in *Review for Religious*, vol 34, n 2 (March 1975), p 283, note 14. This article remains one of the best for an overall coverage of the topic from several points of view, including a discussion of the benefits and dangers of friendships between celibate men and women. It also has an extensive bibliography in the footnotes.

<sup>11</sup> Pable, Martin W., O.F.M. Cap.: 'Psychology and asceticism of celibacy', in *Review for Religious*, vol 34, n 2 (March 1975), p 272.

<sup>12</sup> Kane, Thomas A.: 'American Church and priest in the last twenty years of this century', Convocation Address, Christ the King Seminary, East Aurora (5 October 1982).

<sup>13</sup> Harding, M. Esther: *Woman's mysteries* (New York, 1971), p 105.

<sup>14</sup> Ulanov, Ann Belford: *The feminine in jungian psychology and in christian theology* (Evanston, 1971), p 328.

<sup>15</sup> Jung, Carl: 'Psychology and religion: West and East', *Collected Works*, vol 11, p 273, cited in June Singer: *Boundaries of the soul* (Garden City, 1973), p 392.

<sup>16</sup> For an excellent book on the subject of christian urgency and passionate involvement in all the dimensions of life and relationships, cf McNamara, William, O.C.D.: *Mystical passion, spirituality for a bored society* (New York, 1977).

<sup>17</sup> Rahner, Karl: 'The celibacy of the secular priest today: an open letter', in *Servants of the Lord* (New York, 1968), p 166.