

# CELIBACY AS CHARISM

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## *Introduction*

**N**UMEROUS FACTORS IN CONTEMPORARY CHURCH culture and society have combined to obscure the once seemingly self-evident value and witness of consecrated celibacy.<sup>1</sup> First, the imposition of lifelong singleness on all Latin-rite Catholic clergy, many of whom are not called to or gifted for consecrated celibacy, has created a situation of nearly hopeless confusion and counter-witness not only among the laity and clergy themselves but even among some religious.<sup>2</sup> Second, modern social preoccupations such as fear of pregnancy, disease, intimacy and commitment as well as the hesitation of many women to enter into a state of life still largely defined in patriarchal terms have led many people to choose a celibate life-style. Consequently, the mere fact that someone has chosen not to marry does not necessarily express anything of religious significance. Third, an incoherent but fairly prevalent (and acted upon) conviction among homosexual religious, especially men, that a commitment to celibacy by a homosexual does not imply or demand sexual abstinence has combined with the public scandal of heterosexual infidelity and child sexual abuse by religious and clerics to undermine seriously the credibility and witness value of genuine consecrated celibacy. Finally, the development of healthy and faithful intimate friendships between men and women celibates is confusing to many because our culture strongly suggests that any close relationship, especially between eligible (i.e. non-married) people is probably genital.

This combination of factors means for many if not most people in our culture non-marriage does not imply sexual abstinence or carry religious significance. In other words, there is no commonly accepted understanding of or self-evident witness value to the celibacy of religious. If consecrated celibacy is to be understood and practised as a charism it needs to be realistically re-examined in light of contemporary experience, freely re-appropriated by religious who choose it in response to a personal vocation, and re-articulated in terms of contemporary theology and spirituality on the one hand and contemporary cultural understandings on the other.

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*Motivation*

Given that fear, distrust, contempt, much less hatred of the body and/or sexuality is no longer regarded as a virtue, that marriage is properly seen as a path to Christian holiness, and that singleness is not required for or even necessarily a help to ministry, the question of the motivation for consecrated celibacy requires re-examination. Certainly the normal path to human maturity is intimate, committed relationship with an appropriate adult partner and the most natural task of adult human beings is reproduction and the nurturing of the next generation. Why then do some people choose another path, that of lifelong singleness and childlessness? Is such a choice sane, healthy, life-enhancing? If so, under what conditions?

Discussions among religious, both those who have lived the life for many years and those who are starting out on the path, reveal a plurality of actual motivations for consecrated celibacy. It seems to me that any realistic discussion of the topic must start with the actual lived experience of people rather than with theories or abstract principles.

Some people testify that they experience their relationship with God, in and through Jesus, to be of such a character that it seems to make marriage to another human being somehow psychologically 'impossible', not in the sense that these people could not happily marry if they wanted to but that marriage does not seem to be an authentic choice for themselves. This mysterious sense of being 'called' to celibacy is not a denigration of sexuality or marriage or other people. It is a personal sense that one has found one's centre, one's fulfilment in the relationship with God in some way that makes an exclusive, sexually expressed, lifelong commitment to another human being somehow incompatible with who one most deeply is. Celibacy for such people is the *symbolic expression of this religious experience* in the strong sense of the word symbol i.e. it renders present, visible and active something (in this case, a particular relationship with God) which is imperceptible but very real.

This experience, as it is expressed by people who live it, is analogous to the experience of a happily married person. Just as the choice to marry is the expression of a sense of personal fulfilment in this relationship which is expressed positively in loving mutuality and 'negatively' in fidelity, i.e. in abstaining from sexual relationship with anyone else, so the choice of consecrated celibacy is the expression of a sense of personal fulfilment in the relationship with God which is expressed positively in the life of prayer tending always toward contemplative union and 'negatively' in abstaining from sexual relationship with anyone else. In both cases, that of marriage and that of consecrated

celibacy, the perpetuity of the commitment belongs self-evidently to the nature of the experience, not as something required by external authority but as intrinsic to the commitment itself.

It is not surprising that this foundational motivation for celibacy, the most mysterious in one way but the most integral and obvious in another, has been expressed throughout the history of spirituality in marital imagery.<sup>3</sup> This imagery makes some psychologically attuned people uneasy. They fear that it represents the projection of repressed sexuality. While there is no doubt that such could be and sometimes certainly is the case, the sheer pervasiveness of the symbolism in the writing of saints whose balance and holiness are hardly open to question suggests that it is somehow intrinsic to the experience of healthy consecrated celibacy for these people. As marital fidelity is symbolic of the true spousal relationship, so sexually abstinent non-marriage is symbolic of the relationship with God in Christ of these celibates.

A second widely attested motivation for celibacy which has sustained the commitment in religious life for many women and men is sexual *sublimation*, which is not to be confused with repression. While it is clear from the example of married ministers that there is no incompatibility between ministry and marriage which is often the most sustaining context for effective ministry, it is also evident that for some people total self-donation in the service of others or of a great enterprise requires of them, because of their own psychological constitution, the renunciation of other life-encompassing commitments such as marriage and family. Like some artists or scientists who have foregone marriage in the service of their vocation, such people find that they can ultimately only 'do one thing' and their vocation to serve the reign of God has required of them the choice of a celibate life-style.<sup>4</sup> Just as a daughter who freely sacrifices marriage to care for orphaned siblings can find genuine fulfilment in that service, so for many religious the sacrifice of marriage and family for the sake of the gospel, while difficult, is not only possible but authentic and healthy.

There seem to be some major, although not so obvious, differences between the symbolic and the sublimational motivations for celibacy. Most people in the second group are very aware of the painful character of their sacrifice. They experience keenly the loneliness and sexual frustration entailed in the deprivation of family. And they tend to re-evaluate the choice when something arises which seems to suggest that it is no longer serving or necessary for the ministerial commitment for which it was made. Such people sometimes seem to 'grow beyond' sublimational celibacy when they meet the right person, one whose love seems more conducive to growth and commitment than their celibacy.

Those for whom celibacy is the authentic symbolic expression of their relationship with God seldom talk of sacrifice any more than a happily married spouse thinks a great deal about the sacrifice of all the others she or he might have married. Nor are they psychologically open to sexually freighted relationships. But just as a healthy married person can be challenged by powerful sexual fantasies of other partners and can be suddenly infatuated or drawn into a relationship which begins to raise the question of fidelity in a dramatic way, these celibates are liable to experience soul-searing struggles with celibacy at some point in their life when another person, strangely attractive in ways no one else has ever been, offers the possibility of a new experience of intimacy and fulfilment. Rather than experiencing 'a growing beyond' celibacy into marriage, these people experience an agonizing struggle over celibacy in terms of fidelity and, whatever they decide to do, it will involve a painful choice.

A third collection of motivations for celibacy might be called *instrumental* in that celibacy is not chosen directly either as the symbolic expression of the most fundamental relationship in one's life or as the best or even necessary way of channelling one's spiritual energy. It is, in a sense, not chosen at all but accepted as the condition for something else which seems desirable enough to warrant paying the price of celibacy. Some people seek membership in a community which offers solidarity in relationships and mission. Others, often homosexually oriented, seek a same-sex environment free from the stigma and violence of a homophobic society. Some people, especially women whose feminist consciousness has been raised, need and want life companionship but have no attraction to patriarchally defined marriage. An increasing number of men and women who have completed one career and/or outlived their marriage are looking at ministry as a 'second career' and religious community offers a stable and organized context for that choice.

What all of these situations have in common is that they are choices for relationships and/or ministry in communities which happen to be celibate, rather than a choice of celibacy as either the expression of one's own spiritual experience or as the way of directing one's own life energy. The non-choice of consecrated celibacy appears in such questions as, 'Why does one have to be celibate to enter this community?' or 'What is the problem with a mature, sexually active homosexual relationship provided that it does not interfere with one's community responsibilities?' or 'Why could we not have married couples in the religious community if they are equally committed to community and ministry?'

or 'Why should one have to make a permanent commitment to membership (much less celibacy) in order to be a full-fledged member of the community?' Sometimes the desire for community and the commitment to socially transformative ministry is sufficiently powerful to lead to a virtual suppression of the questions, doubts and resistances these people harbour around celibacy, permanent commitment, and other critical features of religious life.

The actual presence in religious communities of people who have never actually chosen celibacy as well as the quest for admission by others who feel no real vocation to it demands a serious examination of the historical developments which resulted in the *de facto* identification of voluntary faith community with the life of consecrated celibacy i.e. religious life. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially in the First World, ecclesiastical authority virtually assimilated ministerial religious life, sociologically and canonically, to the clerical state resulting in the subversion of the liminal and prophetic life-style of consecrated celibacy.<sup>5</sup> Religious became a disciplined and reliable job corps for institutionally espoused domestic works and foreign missions. In this context the vows came to be seen as instruments of ministerial effectiveness. Celibacy removed the familial commitments which would impede mobility and total availability; obedience sacralized hierarchical lines of command; poverty pooled and thereby maximized scarce material resources. The mystical/religious character of the vows disappeared into sacralized instrumentalism.

It is not at all surprising that people interested in sharing community life with ministerially committed companions should have seen religious life as an ideal context and the vows as provisional instruments to be accepted to the extent that they seemed necessary or effective for promoting community life and ministry. The obligations of the vows certainly deterred some from joining but others saw these burdens as bearable if painful entrance requirements. This approach to religious life is often expressed by such remarks as, 'I always wanted to be a Jesuit (or Sister of Mercy, etc.)', or 'I just wanted to be a missionary (or teacher, etc.)'. If asked whether, were the order to be disbanded or the work abandoned, they would continue to pursue religious life they would say no. They never actually felt called to religious life itself but to membership in a particular group and/or participation in a certain ministry.

It seems to be the case, especially since Vatican II, that increasing numbers of committed believers desire some form of community life and ministerial involvement that goes beyond what is available in the ordinary parish. Some have found such faith community in the Charis-

matic Movement, *Cursillo*, or recovery programmes. Others have formed covenant communities, peace and justice communities, various kinds of Basic Ecclesial Communities, faith-sharing groups, feminist spirituality communities, and missionary associations of one kind or another. Some of these communities are organized around particular forms of prayer, spirituality, social action or ministry. Many are open to both single and married people, to Christians of various denominations and/or those of other religious traditions, and to people who have primary membership in other communities such as a religious congregation or diocesan presbyterate. Few require lifelong commitments although some do require contracts of stipulated length. Communities like the Grail, the Catholic Worker, L'Arche, Focolari, and Friendship House have very stable organizations and life-styles which sociologically resemble religious communities.

The primary characteristic which differentiates religious life from all of these forms of lay community is the constitutive role in religious life of consecrated celibacy as a lifelong response to a personal vocation. For three reasons it seems to me that religious life must preserve this distinction. First, if consecrated celibacy as a charism is to exercise its witness value in the Church and world it needs to be incarnated in a visible and stable form which not only nurtures it but manifests it. In other words, while community and ministry are not exclusive to religious life the particular mutual relation between these values and the charism of celibacy as it is realized in religious life is distinctive and worth fostering.

Second, although there have always been, and there are today, those who live consecrated celibacy without the supporting structure of celibate community it would seem that for most of those who choose celibacy, especially in a sex-saturated culture, there is a particular need for a celibate community context which validates and supports the integral living of this charism.

Third, if voluntary faith community and shared ministry are to become lived values in the Church as a whole, especially among the laity, religious life must not monopolize these values. Religious, it seems to me, should be fostering and supporting lay initiatives in community, not absorbing the potential leaders into religious congregations which, in the last analysis, do not arise from lay experience or pursue a fundamentally lay agenda.

In short, it would seem that for the sake of religious and laity alike the Church needs religious communities and that the members' lifelong commitment to consecrated celibacy which is the characteristic charism

of these communities should not be diffused outwardly or confused inwardly. Rather religious communities of celibates need to affirm their limited but distinctive identity in creative and mutually enriching relationship with other types of community in the Church.

*Characteristics of consecrated celibacy*

If genuine consecrated celibacy cannot be either imposed by law or merely accepted as an entrance requirement for some form of life, what is its true character? First, consecrated celibacy is essentially the free choice by which one *responds to a personal vocation*. Celibacy, like marriage, involves the lifelong orientation of one's sexuality i.e. one's relational capacity for self-transcendence in love. If this most basic capacity is not oriented and fulfilled according to one's own deepest needs and desires it is hardly conceivable that one will develop into a healthy, integrated and mature person.<sup>6</sup> It seems to be the case that very few people are actually called to consecrated celibacy, actually feel after long reflection and testing that the most creative and life-giving way for them to actualize their sexuality i.e. their capacity for relationship, is by abstaining from marriage and procreation and from genitally expressed relationships over a lifetime.

But secondly, it must be realized that genuine celibacy is the 'negative' face of a choice which is *essentially positive*. The choice not to marry and to practise the chastity appropriate to that choice is the visible *manifestation of a relationship* to God and/or a personal dedication to God's people that, for this individual, is experienced as incompatible with marriage, not because someone made a law to that effect but because one experiences the relationship and/or the dedication as all-consuming. It is experienced as exclusive in virtue of its intensity and the expression of that exclusivity is celibacy just as marital fidelity is the expression of the experienced exclusivity of one's relationship with one's spouse, not because there is a law against adultery, but because of the quality of the union. It is crucial to stress that this experience is mysterious, personal, and not susceptible of generalization. Like a particular marriage, celibacy is a personal choice in response to a personal vocation. This choice in no way suggests any incompatibility between intense love of God and marriage and/or ministry. It says something about the way the love of God and/or ministry is experienced by this particular person.

The third characteristic of consecrated celibacy is that it involves a *lifelong choice of sexual abstinence*. No matter how common sexual activity among celibates may be or how compassionate toward human frailty (our own and that of others) we are, sexually active celibacy is as much a

contradiction in terms as a sexually unfaithful marriage.<sup>7</sup> Contemporary experience makes this claim about abstinence, which was once as self-evident as the requirement of marital fidelity (self-evident does not mean generally observed but generally accepted in principle), difficult to sustain today. Because singleness, which can in no sense be equated with consecrated celibacy, has been imposed on all clerics there is a sizeable cohort of single religious professionals in the Church who are not called to nor gifted for this life and who have to deal as best they can with a condition that is for them unchosen and for many of them psychologically unhealthy. Some have simply decided that they cannot live without sexual intimacy and have made choices that are clearly incompatible with celibate chastity but which they deem legitimate or at least necessary because they feel trapped between an impossible law and their genuine vocation to ordained ministry. One can empathize with their dilemma, lament the counter-witness that their behaviour offers in relation to religious life, and attempt to minimize the scandal that the systematic violation of public commitment causes, but no real solution to this problem will be available as long as mandatory singleness remains a requirement for ordination.

A more recent confusion around the issue of sexual abstinence as an intrinsic feature of consecrated celibacy arises from the increasing openness of homosexual religious about their orientation and behaviour. Some (many?) homosexual celibates, especially gay men, are convinced that because their sexual liaisons do not relate them to women and cannot result in marriage and/or children, celibate chastity for them does not entail sexual abstinence. This position reflects another aspect of the profound misunderstanding of celibacy resulting from mandatory clerical singleness. Requiring all clergy to be single is, historically, closely tied on the one hand to the fear and hatred of women of a patriarchal and sexist ecclesiastical institution and, on the other hand, to the desire to protect Church property from clerical dependants. However, the sexual abstinence of consecrated celibacy has nothing to do with rejection of women or protection of ecclesiastical property. It is intrinsic to a certain experience of God which gives rise to the choice not to establish an exclusive, lifelong, genitally expressed relationship with another.

To maintain that the expression of one's sexuality is chastely celibate as long as it does not involve commitment, responsibility or fecundity is a bizarre conclusion from essentially twisted premises. Furthermore, the fact that an all-male, all-single clergy, often confusedly melded with religious life in men's orders, apparently attracts a much higher propor-



tion of gay men than are found in the general population compounds the problem by concentrating a homosexual population, some of whom do not see any contradiction between a public commitment to celibacy and a sexually active life-style, in a very small social world.

I want to be clear that I am talking about the systematic violation of a public commitment to celibacy, not about the suitability of homosexual men or women for religious life. Sexual orientation has nothing to do with the call to consecrated celibacy and homosexuals, throughout Christian history, have been called to celibacy as have heterosexuals. But just as heterosexual genital activity is incompatible with a public profession and integral living of consecrated celibacy, so is homosexual activity.

In summary, consecrated celibacy as a charism i.e. as a gift of God to the person and through the person to the Church, is the free, lifelong committed response of a person who feels called to remain unmarried (and therefore sexually abstinent) as the outward expression of a personal and particular relationship with God and the reign of God. The content of the charism is the relationship; the expression of this interior reality is lifelong celibacy, i.e. chaste (sexually abstinent) non-marriage.

#### *The witness of consecrated celibacy*

A charism is a gift of God to an individual, or through an individual to a group, for the sake of the Church. Therefore, it is crucial to ask what contribution consecrated celibacy as a charism makes to the life and holiness of the Church. In the past there was a tendency to see the answer to this question in the pragmatic advantages for ministry of singleness or in the supposed moral superiority of a more difficult or sacrificial life. Today both of these answers are highly suspect. It is not at all clear that singleness is more conducive to ministerial effectiveness than a successful marriage and Vatican II's teaching on the universality of the call to holiness<sup>8</sup> has de-legitimated the superiority claim for celibacy.

Throughout history and across religious traditions celibacy and/or virginity have been associated in a special way with the life and social role of the 'shaman', the quasi-professional holy person who mediates the encounter with divinity.<sup>9</sup> Certainly there is some response to the virginal archetype operative in the Catholic veneration of consecrated celibacy.<sup>10</sup> But this archetypal significance is relativized in the Christian tradition by the incarnation and its valuation of the body. Christian consecrated celibacy, in other words, is analogous to the celibacy of

religious specialists in other traditions but the differences are at least as important as the similarities.

Celibacy is a symbolic life-style and as such it gives rise to reflection rather than univocal decoding.<sup>11</sup> What celibacy means to the one who lives it as well as what it witnesses to for those who observe it in practice can change with time and experience and no one can exhaustively 'explain' its meaning. But, by way of example, I will offer four clusters of meaning to which this charism draws our reflection.

First, freely chosen and faithfully lived celibacy, in the Christian tradition, is a personal response to God in Jesus and raises the question of how this man who lived and died 2,000 years ago can command such total devotion, can focus and fulfil the relational capacity of a person in such a way that the supremely valuable human good of marriage is willingly foregone. Consecrated celibacy, in this sense, is an *existential Christology* worked out in a loving life-style rather than in concepts.

Second, because celibacy involves a lifelong, single-minded quest for God which bypasses the most fundamental of the normal mediations of God's love, namely, marriage and parenthood, it says something important about the reality, the absoluteness and the all-sufficiency of God. Celibacy is an *existential theology* which practically, rather than theoretically, discerns God as the All who is, in utter truth, the fulfilment of the human heart.

Third, celibacy by its very 'strangeness' in relation to normal human longings for marital intimacy and parental generativity, constitutes a highly original, lived understanding of what it means to be human. Especially for women who have been socialized to understand themselves as incomplete persons who only find wholeness in union with a husband and only find fulfilment in motherhood, the choice of lifelong celibacy is a testimony to the essential completeness, self-possession, and capacity for total self-gift of the human person. The joyous singleness of genuine celibacy is a lived *theological anthropology*.

Finally, celibacy as a life choice is essentially complementary in its witness value to the other major form of consecrated life in the Church, matrimony. While both married and celibate Christians are called to live the whole of the Christian mystery they each can only witness visibly to some aspects of it. The absoluteness of the celibate witness needs the relationality of married witness; the witness to wholeness and self-possession of celibacy is complemented by the marital witness to the essential interdependence of human beings in general and men and women in particular. In other words, the ecclesial solidarity which is the necessary context of meaningful celibate witness is a kind of *theology of the Church in action*.

*The challenge of celibate friendship*

Although intimate friendships have been lived by mature (often extraordinary) celibates down through the centuries,<sup>12</sup> our own time has made this experience much more common. In this respect religious participate in the social-sexual revolution of the late twentieth century. Women who were once restricted to the private realm of the home now function in the public sphere of the workplace where, without their husbands, they meet and interact closely with men on a daily basis. The challenge this has created for men and women who are married has an analogy in religious life.

Today religious, who were once strictly sexually segregated both within their own houses and from the other sex, interact on a daily basis in unsupervised settings with people of the same and the other sex, religious and lay, married and single. It is virtually inevitable that many religious will, at some point, form an intimate, long-lasting, and altogether special friendship with a person who is, potentially, a life partner. If such people are to live, both in exterior behaviour and interior fidelity, their celibate vocation, the challenges of this social reality have to be acknowledged, prepared for in formation, and engaged with freedom, courage and conviction. Consideration of what this involves and how it might be done is well beyond the scope of this article but I will make a few observations that might stimulate conversation on the subject.

First, as the experience of so many faithful religious has made clear in recent years, genuine friendship is such a powerful contribution to the loving union which is at the heart of religious life, to the psychological balance and health of the religious, to the energizing of ministry, and to the enrichment of community, that the effort necessary to sustain and foster such relationships is worth the investment.

Secondly, only a clear-eyed and non-negotiable commitment to celibacy and to whatever strategies and sacrifices are necessary to avoid compromising it can make a healthy friendship of this type possible within the celibate context. The warning signs of exclusivity, jealousy, possessiveness, secrecy, dishonesty, the subordination of spiritual and ministerial responsibility to the exigencies of the relationship, and recklessness in regard to sexual boundaries will help alert the committed celibate to the need for reflection and revision. To be faithful and loving in a cultural setting such as ours requires uncommon ego-strength, sexual integration, psychological maturity, and intense prayer-sustained spiritual commitment. In the end, celibacy cannot be joyously lived as a holding operation whose motivation is preservation of a self-image,

guilt, or fear. It can only be a healthy and holy choice if it is integrated into and expressive of a great love that both enhances and relativizes every other love in one's life.

### *Conclusion*

The unitive love which consecrated celibacy symbolizes is what the great religious figures of our tradition have called contemplation. Celibacy is not a personal achievement, an act of the heroic will, a statement of affective invulnerability, or a declaration of psychological independence. *A fortiori* it is not a means of control, of or by oneself or someone else. It is not an entrance requirement to an élite organization, the ascetic discipline of the morally superior, a noble sacrifice, or a way of building *esprit de corps* in a group. It cannot be imposed, commanded or required. As a charism celibacy is the public face of contemplative experience making visible in this world the absolute freedom, the captivating beauty, the supreme generosity, and the ultimate fidelity of that divine 'love that moves the sun and the other stars'.<sup>13</sup> Its life breath is prayer. Its ultimate explanation lies somewhere in the depths of Holy Mystery. And it is carried in fragile vessels of clay in order that it might be clear to all that the 'transcendent power is from God and not from us'.<sup>14</sup>

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I use 'consecrated celibacy' to refer to celibacy as a charism because the other available terms all involve ambiguity or other problems. Celibacy itself refers only to being unmarried for whatever reason; virginity is not required for nor necessarily the object of the religious profession of consecrated celibacy; chastity is the virtue required of all, married, single or celibate. Sometimes in this article I use celibacy without the adjective for the sake of brevity when the context makes clear that the reference is to the charism.

<sup>2</sup> Since this topic is taken up in another article in this *Supplement* I mention it here only for the sake of completeness.

<sup>3</sup> Origen, writing in the third century, interpreted the biblical Song of Songs as a wedding hymn celebrating the nuptial union of the soul with the Word of God. He thus inaugurated a tradition which can be traced throughout the history of Christian spirituality in writers such as Cyprian, Ambrose, Bernard of Clairvaux, Catherine of Siena, the Béguines, the author of *The cloud of unknowing*, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross in which mystical union with God is expressed in marital imagery. This imagery was applied preferentially (but not exclusively) to virginal consecration and gave rise to the use of marital symbols such as the veil and the ring in the rituals of religious profession.

<sup>4</sup> This motivation for celibacy has often appealed to Mt 19:12 on 'eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God'. While this interpretation is open to debate from the exegetical standpoint it does testify to the understanding of celibacy which is under discussion.

<sup>5</sup> See Diarmuid O'Murchú, *The prophetic horizon of religious life* (London: Excalibur, 1989), especially chapter 2, on the connection of liminality, prophecy and celibacy in the religious life.

<sup>6</sup> The documented psychological and social underdevelopment of a large portion of the clergy (see e.g. the study by Eugene C. Kennedy and Victor J. Heckler, *The Catholic priest in the United States: psychological investigations* [Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1972], pp 3–16, 79–106) as well as the increasing scandal of sexual abuse by clergy and religious testifies to the damage attributable to lack of sexual integration.

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note a kind of ‘rediscovery’ among young adults of the importance of fidelity to the success of relationships. See e.g. the essay by Elissa Alford, ‘Love from the ashes’, *San Francisco Chronical: This World* (18 April 1993), p 16.

<sup>8</sup> *Lumen gentium*, chapter 5.

<sup>9</sup> See note 5 above.

<sup>10</sup> On the ‘virgin archetype’, see Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in everywoman: a new psychology of women* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), pp 35–45.

<sup>11</sup> The famous line, ‘The symbol gives rise to thought’ and its explanation comprises the concluding chapter of Paul Ricoeur’s *The symbolism of evil*, tr. E. Buchanan (Boston: Beacon, 1967).

<sup>12</sup> Famous exemplars are John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, Jane de Chantal and Francis de Sales.

<sup>13</sup> This is the lovely last line of Dante’s *Paradiso* (Canto XXXIII, 145) in *The divine comedy*.

<sup>14</sup> 2 Cor 4:7.