

# Great Option of Celibacy

Third in a Series

By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

We live in an age of dialogue and communication, but communication is never detached from meaning. Talk between persons generally makes sense. One of the most intimate forms of communication is sex, but sexuality is never something "by itself". In humans it is never in isolation.

It is not like paint on a palette, but like colors in a portrait. It is always a vehicle for the union of spirit with spirit; it is not the mouth smiling, nor the body copulating; it is the total person in relation to the spirit of another person.

Celibacy makes the communication directly with the Spirit; marriage makes the communication with the Spirit indirectly through unity with the spirit of the partner. "The rationale of celibacy," as David Day Williams puts it, "in the Christian faith is never renunciation for its own sake, but always that love for God and neighbor be fulfilled this way". Martin Buber says practically the same thing: "... it makes men responsible toward what is holy", that is the Holy Spirit. Max Thurian, the well known European Protestant, wrote that celibacy "is a parable for a world without God ... The Christian can renounce everything for the sake of Christ and His Gospel."

Both marriage and celibacy as means of communion have the same ultimate ends: Love without satiety, ecstasy without end, a surrender to the beloved without ever falling back on egotistic loneliness. Both want a "Love we fall just short of in all love" — God.

Too long have marriage and celibacy been presented as opposites, as so many have made different the truth of the atomic scientist and the truth of the theologian. All truth is from God: the first is about a cosmos which will be dissolved for a "new earth", the other is about a truth seen through a glass in a dark manner which will one day be identified with Him. Who said "I am the Truth".

Celibacy and marriage both want Love, as religion and science both want Truth. They, however, differ in their pen-ultimates, or stages on the roadway to the ultimate.

Celibacy uses the direct current; marriage uses the alternating current. Celibacy travels by air; marriage travels by roadway. Celibacy is like poetry, keeping the ideal ever in mind like a dream; but marriage uses chisel and brush, concentrating more on marble and canvas. Celibacy jumps to a conclusion like an intuition; marriage, like reason, labors through ebb and flow, step by step.

Both celibacy and marriage have the same passion of love, except that celibacy is immediate though imperfect, while marriage is mediate and also imperfect. Celibacy is a "passionless passion, wild tranquility"; marriage is incompleteness seeking unity through consuming fires.

They are both good: Celibacy is not higher, marriage is not lower, but they are signs of the one Great Sign which is the Church. In a certain sense, they are sub-signs of the Church which is the "sign and sacrament of the world's salvation". One is not loftier than the other; anyone than Peter with the Jews was better than Paul with the Gentiles; they had different vocations.

The fallacy in discussion about celibacy is the comparison of one man's vocation with another; it is like arguing about the relative perfection of the right leg over the left. Celibacy is a vocation to be an immediate sign of Christ and the Church; marriage is the mediate sign of the impregnation of the Church by the Word of God. Celibacy and marriage are complementary and not competitive. Both want God, and the degree of possession does not depend on the state of life, but on the degree of response to grace. Both can frustrate Love — the celibate by not "begetting children in Christ", the married by plugging up the communication between the City of Love and the City of Life.

## Celibacy Is a Gift

"There is a variety of gifts, but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of services to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God working in all of them" (1 Cor. 12/4, 5).

Because celibacy is "un-natural" only in the sense that man is physically incomplete, it follows that if God is going to have ultimate lovers (celibates) as well as pen-ultimate lovers (marriage). He must give celibates a gift to live that life. The Apostles suggested to Our Lord that in the light of the difficulty of salvation in marriage, and the risks of adultery, "it is not advisable to marry." The retort of Our Lord was: "It is not everyone who can accept what I have said". Celibacy is not for everyone. It is only for those who receive from Him the "gift". It is "only for those to whom it is granted". As He put it: "There are eunuchs born that way from their mother's womb; there are eunuchs made by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves that way for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can" (Matt. 19/12-12).

Celibacy is a gift, a special gift. It is not something a person does by his own will and through his own power. The initiative is on God's side; the response is on ours. No one is bound to receive a gift at Christmas. But if one does accept it, at least an obligation exists to acknowledge it and to use it.

God gave us the Gift of His son which creates the obligation that we give up certain things for Him (Rom. 8/32). Mankind, however, rejected the Gift. Calvary was man's reaction to that Gift. For anyone to say: "Christ was forced on us", is just as false as to say that any grace or any gift, such as celibacy, is forced on us. Celibacy is not man's gift to God; it is God's gift to man.

## How Celibacy Is "Optional"

Much talk in affluent civilizations exists about the necessity of making celibacy optional, though one does not hear this talk in nations where the Church is persecuted. The fact is that celibacy is optional only in the sense that it is a gift. He

who wishes to receive it will be given the grace to preserve it. The fallacy in much writing on this subject is comparing celibacy to a man or woman in the face of marriage. No man is forced to marry that woman, and no woman is forced to marry that man. In fact, either may not marry at all.

But in the vocation to the priesthood, Christ has opted us. Our Lord said: "You have not chosen Me; I have chosen you". Our option is to accept or reject His vocation; but our option is not to decide, as we shall see, how much we will respond.

The Apostles, when they were called to be "fishers of men", could have refused, but once they accepted the vocation, fishing for men was no longer optional. Mary could have opted not to become the Mother of God, but once she accepted the gift of Divine Maternity, she was no longer free not to share the Sufferings and Passion of her Son.

## Count the Cost

Once the vocation is accepted, once the gift of becoming a eunuch for the Kingdom of God is received, how much option remains? Three young "seminarians" came to Our Lord, and offered to be His followers. He had just been speaking of His Cross and the necessity to "count the cost" of being His disciples. He said: "Which of you here intending to build a tower would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, the onlookers would start making fun of him saying: 'Here is a man who started to build a tower and was unable to finish it.'" (Luke 14/28-29).

Let those who build half-finished towers justify it as they please; let them invoke those verbal excuses of "commitment", "sensitivity" and "involvement". Really these words are like empty freight trains carrying the burden of those too lazy to think for themselves. The fact is that the onlookers, the laity, the people of God do not see any such glory in half-finished towers or one hour and twenty minute Calvaries.

The three would-be followers offered Our Lord three options: The first was economic: I will follow, but what about my security? What do I get out of this? The Lord rejected the option. "Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His Head" (Matt. 8/21).

The second option was worldliness with deferment of mission. The youth's father was not yet dead. The Kingdom of Heaven can wait, and furthermore, there may be an inheritance when the father dies. Think of how much good for the poor can be done with his money. To this the Lord answered: "Leave the dead bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the Kingdom of God (Luke 9/59-60).

The third option was flesh, affection, carnal ties, friendship, and escape from loneliness. The warmth of love and the hearth of common interests are imperative: "I will follow you after I take care of these". This option was rejected too: "Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9/61-62).

There is a sternness about the Lord which is so often ignored. His love or agape was independent of any emotion. When Our Lord asked the judgment of others concerning His Nature, men said: "He was Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets". The second response was from the Divinely-illuminated Peter who said: "You are the Son of the Living God". Both were incomplete. Our Lord added that He was the Suffering Servant (Matt. 16/16). Peter did not want to hear it; we do not want to hear it. The Cross today is a dirty word. Give a sermon on the necessity of sacrifice and the carrying of the Cross, and the audience becomes divided. Some accept, but others protest: "I did not agree with everything he said", or, "This is old spirituality". God's Love imperative asks for self-denial.

Celibacy fits into that unpopular Suffering Servanthood of Christ. The true situationist ethics then is: "Whatever pleases Christ, pleases me". To become aware of His Love is to be seized by it. Celibacy is related primarily to Christ and secondly to the Church. Celibacy depends on how much we love the Lord.

## Celibacy and Love of Christ

When celibacy is placed in the context of the Church it becomes an historical, sociological and ecclesiastical problem. When seen in its relation to Christ it becomes discipleship. And discipleship which is different from fellowship is conditioned on taking up the Cross — not the Cross as an instrument, but the love of the Suffering Servant.

Celibacy is the measure of the intensity of a passion, not the absence of it. As Thompson wrote:

"And if they say that snow is cold  
O Chastity, must they be told  
The hand that's chafed with snow  
Takes a redoubled glow?"

The quality and significance of any passion depends on the OBJECT which excites the passion: a pile of gold, a woman, "a hank of hair" as Kipling put it, or God.

Why did Jesus accept the Passion of the Cross? Because of His fiery passion to do the Father's Will. Passion may be passive in accepting circumstances, or it may be active by so loving as to take the consequences, whatever they be.

## Gandhi Took Celibacy

Find out what a man's supreme object of love is, and you will find corresponding surrenders. Why did Gandhi at the age of 31 take a vow with his wife's consent to practice celibacy the rest of his life? Because he had a DHARMA — a life-task or a life-mission which he wished to be followed at all costs. This meant the practice of two virtues: Poverty and celibacy. As Eric Erickson, the psychologist expressed it: "He gave up sexual intimacy for a wider communal intimacy and not just because sexuality seemed immoral. In Gandhi's own words: 'I wanted to devote myself to the

# LETTERS

to the editor



## RACL Viewpoint Taken to Task

Editor:

In the Courier-Journal for Oct. 3, under the caption "RACL Viewpoints," a writer discusses "Priorities in Catholic Education." Guessing at the future of parochial schools he says: "The affluent sections of the community, where public educational facilities attain an unusual level of excellence, would retain their little needed Catholic elementary schools."

This statement completely ignores the "Declaration on Christian Education" of Vatican II. In it we read: "The Council also reminds Catholic parents of the duty of entrusting their children to Catholic schools wherever and whenever possible and of supporting these schools to the best of their ability and of cooperating with them for the education of their children." (Emphasis added).

It is very strange that the more vocal members of an organization calling itself an association of Catholic laymen should so consistently ignore this statement, which makes no distinction between suburban and inner city schools.

I am gradually coming to the conclusion that the reason that RACL members always seem to ignore it is that they have no clear grasp of the philosophy of education which lies behind it, and that instead they believe in what I call "The Chocolate Dip Theory of Education."

Basically this theory holds that the child can receive his secular education in the secular public school. Then by obtaining his religious instruction separately, say through CCD or a School of Religion, he gets his chocolate dip, which makes his education complete.

Since the RACL members who have spoken out through your columns don't understand the basic educational philosophy of Vatican II, it is not surprising that they also ignore the also in the "Declaration." At least calls to political action which are three RACL members have called for more adult education in Catholic parishes. If they can get a course going on Vatican II's "Declaration", perhaps we can have a litany sufficiently in accord with the mind of the Church where we are called upon to vote on the future of parochial school education.

J. K. O'Loane,  
Seneca Pkwy., Rochester

## Tolerance Begins On Family Level

Editor:

None of us can singlehandedly build a beachhead against the raging tide of intolerance such as we read and hear about today: the Communists vs. the squares, the Arabs vs. the Jews, the Irish Catholics vs. the Protestants.

There is, however, a little each of us can do to lessen the horror and the destructiveness that are its com-

sequences. That little may be as insignificant as a grain of sand on a wide beach, but I offer it as a humble suggestion for a beginning:

The first step is to learn to tolerate and accept the individual differences within the immediate circle of

our family household. If we fail to learn and practice the rudiments of tolerance needed in a family, what chance have those persons we must deal with outside with whom we share far less in common?

—Mrs. Edith Hahn, Victor.

## THE POPE SPEAKS

### Pray the Rosary for Peace

Vatican City (NC)—Pope Paul VI has issued an appeal to all Catholics to pray the Rosary during October for the special intention of "peace among men and between peoples."

An apostolic exhortation, dated Oct. 7, the Feast of the Holy Rosary, described the Rosary as a form of prayer which "has lost none of its importance amid the difficulties of the present day."

The Pope said that the intention for which he asked Catholics to pray the Rosary in October "seems to us more serious and urgent than ever," that is, "peace among men and between peoples."

The Pope continued: "Despite some progress and some legitimate hopes, numerous conflicts are continuing, new points of tension are

appearing, and even Christians, who refer to the same Gospel of love, are seen to be in opposition to one another. Within the Church itself, misunderstandings arise between brothers who mutually accuse and condemn each other. Hence it is more urgent than ever to work and pray for peace."

Prayer is therefore "an irreplaceable contribution to the establishment of peace," the Pope said, and the Gospel teaches us that "Mary is sensitive to the needs of men."

He continued: "At Cana, she did not hesitate to intervene in the joy of the villagers invited to a wedding feast. How then, would she not intervene in favor of peace, that precious possession, if we only pray to her with a sincere heart?"



1969 AVANT FEATURES

"A MIGHTY FOR-R-TRESS IS OUR GOD..."

## Word for Sunday

### Sunday: A Bond Among Christians

By Father Albert Shannon

A court official whose son was ill at Capernaum went to Christ in Cana "where he had changed the water into wine." Each Sunday we are bid to go where water and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ, and to interrupt the rhythm of work for a great good. For us, this great good is the Sunday rest. Let us examine briefly the history of its origin.

In the Old Testament God instituted the Sabbath rest to prevent man from being brutalized. In the New Testament the Sunday rest had little to do with the brutalizing effect of unrelenting toil on man, and it originated late in history. The early Christians, being mostly artisans and slaves, and Christianity, being a minority and condemned religion, could make no economic impact on pagan society such as securing a day free from work. Thus Christians came together for Mass before working hours. Pliny wrote, they met before dawn.

After Constantine gave the Church legal status in 313, Christians assembled for Mass at the most important hour of the day, the hour of business, which began at nine o'clock. Mass, as we are now beginning to relearn, was a corporate celebration — everybody was supposed to be there. To make this possible, Constantine in 321 ordered all public courts and markets closed at this hour. This custom prevailed until the Middle Ages.

In the Middle Ages, Christians were still aware of the corporate nature of the Mass. All in a town or village were expected to attend Mass together. That explains the great size of European cathedrals: they were built to house the entire village.

But another growth in the Middle Ages contributed to the extension of the Sunday rest: monasticism. In the thirteenth century monasticism reached its high tide. Monks chanted Mass to prepare for Sunday Mass and ended the day with Vespers. In that age of faith, people wanted to attend these services. So they took time out from work.

This public opinion first forced the Sunday rest then Church Law.

and in the sixteenth century, Civil Law. The old Testament Sabbath rest and the national traditions of northern peoples played a part, it is true. But the rest truly sprang from the desire of medieval man to worship God. The accent was not on rest, but on worship. Man was freed from profane works for worship.

"The cessation from work and labor on Sundays ... is not to be understood as mere idleness," wrote Leo XIII, "... but it should be rest from labor, hallowed by religion. Rest (combined with religious observance) disposes man to forget for a while the business of his everyday life, to turn his thoughts to things heavenly and to worship which he so strictly owes to the Eternal Godhead. It is this ... which is the reason and motive of the Sunday rest" (Rerum Novarum, No. 32).

There is a tendency in this technological age of ours to give man his day off during the week. This is really unjust. For if a day of rest is to benefit man, it is absolutely necessary that he have it when the rest of the community is having its day off. A Sunday rest, common to all, makes it possible to have all kinds of non-religious communal activities, such as bowling, pro-football games, picnics, etc.

A Sunday rest, common to all, is one of the few bonds of unity existing between all Christians. Should Civil Law abrogate the Sunday rest, it would isolate forty-five million Catholics and inject one more divisive element into an already frightfully fragmented society.

In a poll conducted by This Week magazine the question was asked, "How do you enjoy Sunday?" The answers ranged from happy, satisfying, inspiring, to tiring, lonely, monotonous.

Then a second question was asked, "How often do you go to Church on Sunday — often, occasionally, or never?"

The interesting discovery was that the frequent Churchgoers were the ones who found Sunday a happy, restful and inspiring day; that the occasional Churchgoers found it happy and restful, but not inspiring; and that the non-Churchgoers found it tiring, lonely and monotonous. There is truth in the rhyme:

A Sunday well spent  
Brings a week of content  
And health for the toils of tomorrow.  
But a Sunday profaned,  
Whatever may be gained  
Is a certain forerunner of sorrow.

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