



From A Bishop's Journal (610)

For the Kingdom of God (7)

The articles quoted were meant to help us discern the vocation to celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom; may these reflections help us unveil a bit this often misunderstood vocation. Saint Paul's considerations on celibacy were only seeds in the ground: it took a long time for them to be accepted and adopted in the Christian communities. We have only to recall the slow development of the different forms of religious life and of the priesthood, with their monks, hermits, virgins, widows, contemplatives, the apostolic religious life, secular institutes, etc. We even have to wait until Vatican Council II to better understand, thanks to the theological renewal, the import of celibacy in Church and society. Chapter five of the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church stresses the universal call to holiness, a call which does not only concern priests and religious but also the entire laity. The 1987 world synod on the laity once again reiterated this call to holiness in the midst of daily commitments. Theologians like Jean-Marie Tillard and Leonardo Boff wrote on the main elements of celibacy. Men and women like Madeleine Delbr el, or the founders of new associations of lay faithful, draw out more and more the meaning of continent celibacy for the Kingdom of God, and point out its dignity and requirements. In the superabundant number of books and movies on sexuality, reflection on continent celibacy is gaining ground as well as credibility, if not popularity. Here are three examples of the high spirituality of single people: Dag Hammarskj old, late United Nations Secretary General, Madeleine Delbr el, one of the contributors of the "Mission de France" and Jean Vanier, who has dedicated his life to the handicapped. These examples indicate the reason for their choice, personal choices nonetheless inspired by a lofty vision of God and of His deep mystery.

The Union of God

"In faith which is the union of God with the soul, you are in God and God is totally in you, as for you He is fully in what you encounter. In this faith you descend in of prayer into your innermost self in order to meet the Other. In obedience and in the light of union everything is there for you and, like you, alone before God. Every action is a continuous creative act, a conscious act because yours is a human's responsibility; but you are also guided by this Power beyond awareness that has created man, you are free of things but you encounter them in a sensation of liberating purity and the penetrating acuity of revelation. In faith which is the union of God with the soul, everything has meaning, living like this and employing what has been put into your hands" (Diary of Dag Hammarskj old, quoted by Yann Fentener Van Vlissingen).

The Total Christ

“In baptism the Christian has exchanged his personal freedom for freedom in Christ. The Christian is free because Christ is supremely free. However, the Christian no longer has the right to choose a state of life other than that of Christ, to act and think differently from him. His is a state of living faith. Faith is a matter of fact to the Christian, and he has only to accept it. This state of life is to be a child of God in Christ with all his brothers who with him are Christ. To God and to the world, in God and in the world, it is with everyone else that the Christian is Christ. He is the total Christ, the Christ-Church, a matter of fact over which he has no control” (Madeleine Delbr el, *Nous autres, gens des rues* [“We the Street People”],  ditions du Seuil).

A Relationship of Communion

“Our flesh is made to dwell in God, to become God’s Temple. The flesh of Jesus is the Temple of God. We, too, are the Temple of God. Transfigured by the Word made flesh, our flesh becomes an instrument for spreading the love of God. Our flesh is no longer an obstacle to communion with the Word made flesh and with the Father. As with Mary, the flesh of Christ and his humanity are the means through which and in which we encounter God. We are not called to leave the humanity of Christ to encounter a God who transcends the flesh, but to discover and experience the flesh of Jesus as the flesh of God, his body as the sacrament which gives new meaning to our human flesh; the sacrament that reveals to us the eternal love of the Trinity where the Father and the Son, in unity with the Holy Spirit, love one another from all eternity. Our bodies are conceived in silence and love. Our first relationship – with our mother – is one of loving communion through the touch and fragility of the flesh. We are called to grow, to develop, to become productive, to fight for justice and peace, but finally everything is for the gift of oneself, for repose and the celebration of communion. Everything begins in communion, and everything ends in communion” (Jean Vanier, *J sus, le don de l’amour* [“Jesus the Gift of Love”],  ditions Fleurus-Bellarmin).

A Useful and Agreeable Life

“My life at the rectory with Mom and Dad, my brother and, very often, the assistant pastor, answering the phone and greeting people at the church office when the priest was absent, this helped me get to know many people, their problems, their weaknesses, and their illnesses. It was despite myself that I let myself become interested and love all these people, and I understood that my life, filled with all these small services, was useful and even agreeable. I regret nothing, and I know many people, men and women, who lived their celibacy in different circumstances but with the same motivation, and who are happy.” – C cile

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