

THE DECISION FOR CELIBACY

ROGER BALDUCELLI, O.S.F.S.

The Catholic University of America

THIS ESSAY concerns that critical moment within the event of religious formation in which a religious commits himself¹ by decision to the celibate way of life. Its purpose is to seek out the intelligibility of that decision. The enterprise of religious formation has been for some time short of breath and out of sorts. Only a thin volume of traffic has been flowing into the houses of formation that have survived. There the traffic seems to be lively enough, but not enough of it shows a sense of purpose and direction. The context within which the formation enterprise unfolds is, by and large, one of uncertainty and disarray.

The causes of this misery are many and complex enough to call for expert research. The lack of anything that would deserve to count as a theoretical understanding of the formation event is one of these causes, and a prominent one, in my opinion. In spite of the fact that a sizable literature has grown out of the concern for the formation of priests and religious, one is fated to come to grief whenever one aims to ascertain from formation literature what formation really is. There the desire to know does not seem to act itself out radically enough to bring itself to bear on the intelligibility of formation itself. It seems to elect not to wonder what people do when "forming" others or "forming" themselves, why the doing of whatever they do is a "formation" and what "formation" does for those to whom it is imparted. And so one finds oneself flirting after hours with a nasty suspicion: either everyone knows what formation is but no one is telling, or no one is telling because no one knows. Whichever be the case, the contemporary discourse on formation, so prodigal when it comes to goals, policies, programs, and curricula, floats on a theoretical vacuum. And this is a misery. Since policies and programs are meant to prescribe the way in which the event of religious formation is to happen, they must be rated as improvisations whenever they do not emerge from a certified understanding that discloses what kind of an event this event is, and who makes it happen to whom, and how.

FORMATION AS EVENT

Since this essay is limited to one moment within the formation event, the understanding of this event in its totality needs only to be stated here

¹It is only for the sake of convenience that the masculine reference is maintained throughout the paper. No intention to indicate or to imply that reflections to be submitted with regard to the formation event in general, and to the decision for celibacy in particular, are meant to apply only to religious of the male persuasion.

schematically. This is expressed in the following propositions: (1) Religious formation is essentially a growth. (2) This growth happens by the gradual acquisition of strengths specifically adult and specifically religious. (3) These strengths are acquired by successfully negotiating youthful crises. (4) The chief crises to be negotiated are three: intimacy, responsibility, and integrity. Thus the formation event can be described as a growth from youth to adulthood, through the favorable resolution of three youthful crises and the acquisition of corresponding adult and religious strengths.

At the core of this understanding of the formation event lies an epigenetic model of human development. This model maintains that the little fellow who, by the grace and favor of many, has managed to make his debut into the world, all wrinkled, can be trusted to un wrinkle into an adult in keeping with laws that create for him a succession of capacities for encounter, experience, and interaction with the world that surrounds him on every side. Driven from within, he tries his luck in the horizon of experience that is accessible. Within any horizon two basic ways of responding to possibilities and interacting with them are available, and so he faces a crisis, for choice is imperative. If the choice he makes is right, and the crisis is thereby favorably resolved, there accrues to the developing self a strength by which he can function competently within that horizon and become sensitive to the possibilities for experience that constitute the next horizon. There the situation repeats itself, for there, too, the basic modes of responding and interacting are two, and a choice between the one and the other needs to be made. Again the choice of the right mode makes for the advent of the competency required to move within that horizon and to advance to the next horizon, the next crisis, and the next strength.²

By the time a young man crosses the threshold into the enterprise of his religious formation, he has already spent one fourth of his life advancing from one horizon of experience to the next, and from crisis to crisis. The strengths that have accrued to him thanks to every favorable resolution constitute the sum-total of his usable assets. The weaknesses

²The epigenetic model of human development is derived from E. H. Erikson. See in particular: "Identity and the Life Cycle," *Psychological Issues* 1, no. 1, monograph 1 (New York, 1959) 50-99 ("Growth and Crises of the Healthy Personality"); *Childhood and Society* (2nd ed.; New York, 1963) pp. 247-74 ("Eight Ages of Man"); *Insight and Responsibility* (New York, 1964) pp. 111-57 ("Human Strength and the Cycle of Generations"); *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York, 1968) pp. 91-141 ("The Life Cycle: Epigenesis and Identity"); *Young Man Luther* (New York, 1958) esp. pp. 98-125 and 251-67. See also D. A. Fleming, "Formation and the Discovery of Identity," *Review for Religious* 31 (1972-73) 334-41; W. deBont, "Identity Crisis and the Male Novice," *ibid.* 21 (1962) 104-28.

left behind by crises poorly resolved are his liabilities. By means of these assets, and in the teeth of these liabilities, he now enters the road that remains to be covered in order to secure for himself an adult religious identity. Along this road three crises need to happen and be favorably resolved. The first of these is the crisis of intimacy, to be resolved through the decision for celibacy; the second is the crisis of responsibility, to be resolved by a decision for community;³ the third is the crisis of integrity, that comes to resolution in a permanent commitment.

It is under the guidance of this model that an attempt will be made here to evoke the intelligibility of the decision for celibacy. The first task, then, is to describe the crisis of intimacy, and the second to account for that peculiar resolution of that crisis which is the decision for celibacy. To the extent to which the descriptions of the crisis and of its resolution disclose the intelligibility of what they describe, we come to know by understanding what kind of an event the decision for celibacy is, and who makes it happen to whom, and how.

The experience of intimacy is available long before the threshold of adulthood is reached. The daily liturgy of recognition and certification between mother and child, and the participation mystique that thrives on that liturgy, are already intimacy at its best. With the advent of sexual competency, intimacy appears again, woven into the rituals of adolescent interaction. The games adolescents play and their endless

³ What has been named here "the crisis of responsibility" is named by Erikson "the crisis of generativity" in *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, p. 135, and "Generativity vs. Stagnation" in "Growth and Crises," pp. 97-99, and in *Childhood and Society*, p. 266. The shift from "generativity" to "responsibility" is meant to do justice to the particular situation of celibate religious in formation. It is only a terminological departure from the Eriksonian model. In Erikson "generativity" is only primarily "the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation" (*Insight and Responsibility*, p. 130). Forms of altruistic concern other than parenthood are potentially included in the generativity drive, such as the "self-less 'caring'" for "whatever a man generates and leaves behind, creates and produces (or helps to produce)" (*ibid.*, p. 131). Beneath these various forms of generativity there lies the drive to accept responsibility for whatever one brings to existence and "now must be 'brought up,' guarded, preserved—and eventually transcended" (*ibid.*, p. 131). In apostolic forms of religious life the sense of care and responsibility finds expression in the "care of souls." In all forms of religious life the same drive actualizes itself in that conscious effort to care for others which transforms an agglomeration of individuals into a community of persons. It is in this sense that I maintain here that the crisis of responsibility is favorably resolved to the extent to which religious do not merely live a common life but decide to create community by consciously intending to care each for the other and none for himself. For a sustained presentation of the way in which persons come to constitute community, see J. Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London, 1961) pp. 147-65. In *The Structure of Religious Experience* (London, 1936) Macmurray maintains that not only religious life but all religion "is about fellowship and community" (pp. 30 f.). See also R. O. Johann, *The Pragmatic Meaning of God* (Milwaukee, 1966).

I-thou revelations are part intimacy achieved, part quest for intimacy. After the diffusions and ambiguities of adolescence have been transcended and a reasonably firm sense of personal identity achieved, intimacy becomes available to the young as the style of their identity and integrity. A young man has the capacity to find his identity as a man in the act of integrating it into the identity of a woman. Whereas earlier the center around which his personal existence revolved was identical with his own self, now existence becomes thinkable as a project revolving around a center of gravity which is the self of the other, that is, as mutuality, commitment, and fidelity. The very dynamics of existence undergo a corresponding modification. An existence that was concentric and inevitably so can now become eccentric and ecstatic. Instead of having to exist for, through, and with one's own self, one is now competent to exist for, through, and in the presence of the self of the other, who is the coauthor of one's own choices and decision, and ultimately of one's own destiny.⁴

When intimacy becomes so intimately involved with the very understanding of oneself and one's destiny, a crisis of some consequence is in the making. A decision has to be made whether the response to the capacity for intimacy is to be a yes or a no. And the crisis is resolved favorably when, by a benevolent miracle, there appears in consciousness the certainty that all the promises which intimacy holds out to the self are incarnate in one other self. On the strength of this certainty, the capacity for intimacy actualizes itself and reappears as selfless devotion, commitment, and fidelity. These are strengths of the adult man. They redeem him from the blight of alienation, aloneness, and self-absorption. And if the reader should find it difficult to imagine what this blight might be like, let him look about. Before long he will spot in the gallery a man who is his own only child, toy, and pet. This is the man who has faced the intimacy crisis and failed to resolve it. He has allowed his capacity for intimacy to go to waste. He has achieved intimacy, but with the wrong self.

The preceding sketch is the psychosocial version of a proclamation which the biblical tradition has been making for a long time in the unforgettable language of the paradigmatic recital.⁵ There we are told how the

⁴The crisis of intimacy is described by Erikson in "Growth and Crises," pp. 97-99; *Childhood and Society*, pp. 266-68; *Insight and Responsibility*, pp. 124-30; *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, pp. 135-38.

⁵Gn 2:5-25. The second creation account in Gn 2 has been called a "paradigmatic recital," to point to the way in which it was meant to mean. Whereas historical accounts mean by reporting facts factually, that is, as they happened to happen once, the paradigmatic recital means by relating facts that are to repeat themselves, and by

first intimacy crisis happened to come about, and who resolved it, and how. It came about, so to speak, because of a divine oversight. The creator God, who had made His own plantation grow so lavish in natural resources, had been less than totally provident with regard to the one human resource He had evoked out of the earth and His own breath. He had failed to make provision for intimacy, as if He had not known that apart from intimacy the keeper of the plantation would never grow to his intended stature. It had not yet dawned on Him that it is not good for man to be alone. And so, for the sake of intimacy, the creator God takes in hand the task of remedial creation. That all-animal parade that files by in Gn 2:19 is His first try. The try is in the wrong direction, and so it fails. All the animals come and go, but none of them has been called by a name that spells intimacy. The second try is an unqualified success. Out of the intimacy of man's own flesh a woman is summoned, life-size and fully alive. She is meant to be the other self in relation to whom the mutuality of intimacy is to be possible, and indeed inevitable. Translated into contemporary language, the paradigmatic recital announces that it takes one man and one woman and their intimacy to constitute one whole human being. The two belong to each other's adulthood.

JESUS' CASE FOR CELIBACY

It should not come as a surprise if, within a tradition committed to a vertical and God-centered legitimation of intimacy, the legitimation of celibacy has proved to be a repetitive enterprise. It seems as if the case for celibacy could never be made so cogently and conclusively as not to need to be made again. And so the legitimacy of celibacy enjoys in the history of Christian thought the intermittent existence of the work of art. Here attention is to be focused exclusively on the first of these legitimating attempts, which is the one made by Jesus in the eunuchry saying now recorded in Mt 19:12. The reason for this choice is not merely that Jesus' defense of celibacy is chronologically first and that all subsequent defenses had to reckon with it in one way or another. More relevant to the purpose of this inquiry is the way in which Jesus makes his case for celibacy. He announces that it has happened, and how. This announcement is an authoritative clue as to how we need to answer the

participation in which man learns the truth about himself, his existence in the world, and his destiny. Or, to put it differently, the historical account delivers information; the paradigmatic recital delivers self-interpretation. Thus the creation account in Gn 2 does not inform us concerning one historical intimacy crisis; it delivers an image of what the intimacy crisis is about, and of its appropriate resolution. See R. L. Hart, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination* (New York, 1968) pp. 285-87.

question that asks what kind of an event celibacy is, who makes it happen to whom, and how.⁶

A detailed discussion of the editorial prehistory of Mt 19:10-12 is beyond the scope of this essay.⁷ But it needs to be noted, in the first place, that there are critically good reasons for maintaining that the words of v. 12, which, in the Matthean redaction, Jesus addresses to his disciples to answer their objection (v. 11), were originally addressed by Jesus to the Pharisees, as response to one of their obnoxious complaints about himself and his disciples. The little itinerant band was unconventional enough in its ways to call for consternation and indignation among the custodians of convention. These had been shocked by Jesus' disregard of the policy that proscribed commerce with tax collectors and sinners (Mk 2:16; Lk 15:2), by his violation of the Sabbath (Mk 3:2), by his forgiveness of sins (Mk 2:7), by his brand of conviviality (Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34), and by his exorcisms (Mk 3:22; Mt 12:24; Lk 11:15). His disciples, too, had contributed their own share of aggravation by their disregard of the Sabbath law (Mk 2:24), of fasting (Mk 2:18), and of ritual washing (Mk 7:5). Then the supreme vexation: a celibate way of life.⁸ It is by way of responding to this vexation that Jesus spoke the

⁶This should make it plain that Jesus' words are not "used" in what follows as a proof-text to establish the position that celibacy has the right to be. Such use is not objectionable, but neither is it objectionable to use Jesus' words for the purpose of understanding Jesus' own understanding of celibacy itself. This is all the more true in view of the fact that Jesus defends the legitimacy of celibacy by calling for an understanding of what it is. In his mind legitimacy and intelligibility coincide.

⁷See in particular J. Blinzler, "*Eisin eunouchoi*: Zur Auslegung von Mt 19:12," *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 48 (1957) 254-70, and Q. Quesnell, "'Made Themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven' Mt 19:12," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968) 335-58. In line with the contemporary emphasis on *Redaktionsgeschichte*, as distinct from *Formgeschichte*, Quesnell remarks (p. 340) that, although the eunuchry logion has a prehistory, the message which the logion is meant to deliver "is not reserved to those who have the leisure and training to dig out that prehistory." The point is well taken. It should not, however, be taken to mean that what Jesus said from within his own *Sitz im Leben*, and what he meant by what he said, sheds the quality and the value of a message when compared to the message which the Gospel writer aims to convey by the redactional manipulations he undertakes in keeping with his own *Sitz im Leben der Kirche*. Granted that the distances between "the final form" in the mouth of the Church and "the original form" in the mouth of Jesus is more often than not difficult to cover reliably, the original form retains unparalleled interest, whenever it can be trusted to deliver meaning meant by Jesus himself. This is especially true for Jesus' own understanding of celibacy. There are no substitutes for that understanding, only valid or invalid interpretations of it.

⁸There is no direct documentary proof that Jesus and his disciples were taken to task because of their celibate way of life. But, considering the fact that the Pharisees did find fault with Jesus and his disciples whenever they failed to abide by conventional ways, it would be most surprising if they had not noticed their celibate mode of life and had not felt duty-bound to register disapproval. Among the rabbis procreation was looked upon as a

words which in the present redaction are addressed to the disciples.⁹ These are the words that enfranchise celibacy into the new dispensation by making it a legitimate aspect of its happening.

Note, in the second place, that the words of Jesus in v. 12 are not directly an exhortation to espouse celibacy addressed to people who can muster an appreciation of its value. In both devotional and scholarly commentaries the opposite is often taken for granted, but without sufficient justification.¹⁰ The grammar of the text is declaratory (“there are eunuchs. . .”), not exhortatory or prescriptive. And the parting words, “Let anyone accept this who can” (v. 12d), which are exhortatory, are not an exhortation to accept celibacy but to “accept” what has been said about it (“this”), namely, that it has happened.¹¹ This explains why

divine imperative on the strength of Gn 1:28, interpreted as an imperative not of blessing but of command. And the divine imperative was faithfully honored in deference to theological and anthropological reasons “so as not to diminish the [divine] image”—“every man who has not a wife is no man.” See Blinzler, *art. cit.*, p. 268; Schneider, “*Eunouchos, eunouchizō*,” *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* 2 (1935-50) 765; Engl. tr. G. W. Bromiley 2 (1964) 767; H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash* 2 (Munich, 1924) 372. C. G. Montefiore, who can speak with authority in this matter, is certainly right to remark that Jesus’ defense of celibacy “is one of the few points in which Jesus seems distinctly anti-Jewish” (*The Synoptic Gospels* 2 [London, 1909] 691). Blinzler suggests in addition (*art. cit.*, p. 269) that, just as Jesus was called “a glutton and a drunkard” because he broke bread with disreputable characters (Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34), so too he and his disciples were insulted as “eunuchs” because of their celibate way of life. The suggestion is not arbitrary. Considering the intense contempt that the word “eunuch” evoked in his time, Jesus would hardly have referred to himself and his disciples as “eunuchs” unless the insulting epithet had been thrown at them by others. For a taste of the morbid contempt in which eunuchs were held in Jewish society, read the angry exchange between a rabbi and a eunuch in Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar* 1, 567 f.

⁹It is not unusual for the Jewish audience that chanced to hear Jesus’ words as first spoken to be editorially displaced by an audience within the Church (“the disciples,” for example) for the sake of lending these words a broader and more permanent application. J. Jeremias has made a study of this editorial technique and of the shift from the eschatological to the hortatory and parenetic emphasis in *The Parables of Jesus* (New York, 1955) pp. 23-36. See also C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London, 1952) pp. 134 f.

¹⁰This misconception is due to the fact that, although Jesus limits himself to stating that voluntary celibacy has happened, he obviously approves of that happening. The celibacy of which he speaks has happened “because of the kingdom of heaven.” It partakes, therefore, of the value and dignity of the kingdom. See Blinzler, *art. cit.*, p. 259. All the same, there is a difference between approving of a celibacy that has happened and exhorting people to make celibacy happen to themselves.

¹¹“Accept” translates *chōrein*, which means “to accept” something in the sense of “making room” for it by way of grasping and comprehending it. See the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v.3. b. B (p. 898), and F. Zorell, *Novi Testamenti Lexicon* (Paris, 1911) s.v.2. b. B (p. 629). An exhortation to this kind of “acceptance” is equivalent to an exhortation to “understand” what has been stated (“Comprenez qui pourra”—Bible de Jérusalem), to “bear it in mind” (Anchor Bible), or more paraphrastically to “master

Paul, who so outspokenly promotes his own appreciation of celibacy (1 Cor 7:1, 7-8), is not in a position to canonize that appreciation by tracing it back to a direct endorsement ("disposition") of the Lord (1 Cor 7:25). Jesus' restraint is not surprising. A direct exhortation to celibacy would have been wasted on people committed to a vertical legitimation of procreation. They would have found such a discourse not only paradoxical but meaningless. But even an audience of this persuasion could not be so insensitive as to miss the point of an announcement which declares that celibacy has happened in their midst, together with the happening of God's lordship, and as part of that happening. The words of Jesus are such an announcement. Jesus says that in addition to congenital eunuchry and eunuchry inflicted through plastic surgery—the two varieties people are familiar with—there is now on the scene a third variety. This is the eunuchry of people who have made themselves eunuchs *because of* the kingdom of heaven.

Note, in the third place, that the phrase "because of" specifies the way in which Jesus envisages the advent of celibacy. He sees it as part of a larger event which is the saving once-for-all self-disclosure of God's lordship. More precisely: as a consequence of that disclosure. There are people in your midst, he says, who have been grasped by God's lordship so overwhelmingly as to be dispossessed of the capacity to commit themselves to anyone in marriage. *Because of the kingdom of heaven* they are as much disabled from marriage as people in whom indispensable instrumentalities are missing, either because of congenital misfortune or surgical excision. They, too, are celibate because of an existential inability to choose to be otherwise.¹²

the lesson contained in it" (Lilly-Kleist). The translations that have Jesus urge his audience to "accept" this (Jerusalem Bible, New English Bible) or to "receive" it (KJV, RV, RSV, Weymouth, Torrey, *et al.*) or even to "take" it (Basic English) can be misleading. They can be taken to mean that Jesus urges his audience to make room for celibacy, not by grasping that it has happened and how, but by making it happen to themselves. Moffatt's translation "Let anyone practice it for whom it is practicable" is not only ambiguous but mistaken.

¹²The causal meaning assigned to the preposition *dia* when it is translated "because of" does not appear in the English translations of Mt 19:12c. They favor instead the final meaning and translate accordingly "for the sake of . . ." (KJV, RV, RSV, Jerusalem Bible, Anchor Bible, etc.). Commentators generally follow suit and have Jesus announce that there are eunuchs who have made themselves such for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. This is taken to mean that, prior to the decision for celibacy, there goes in them a perception that links celibacy to the kingdom as a means to an end, or as a condition to that which depends on the fulfilment of that condition. Exegetes go their separate ways when specifying what that link is. Celibacy is seen as a means to gain access to the kingdom, or as a condition that needs fulfilling in order to work more freely for its advent, or to live in harmony with its reality. See L. Legrand, *La virginité dans la Bible* (Paris, 1964) p. 37, and

If this interpretation is on the mark, the celibacy which Jesus announces is not intelligible primarily as an event which people make happen to themselves by first deliberating whether it should happen, then deciding that it should so as to be totally free to dedicate themselves to the kingdom to come. The flow of causality runs rather in the opposite direction. What happens first is the self-affirmation of God's lordship. It is this lordship, come to event in the subject, that induces by way of consequence a disablement from marriage, and the decision for celibacy as ratification of that disablement. In other words, the event of celibacy

Conseil de Rédaction, "L'Appel du Seigneur à la virginité," in J. Coppens, ed., *Sacerdoce et célibat* (Gembloux-Louvain, 1971) p. 309. The causal interpretation is advocated by Blinzler, *art. cit.*, p. 263, n. 24: "The kingdom of God is not so much the objective (*Ziel*) of what those people do, as rather its ground (*Grund*); because in the kingdom of God they have recognized the supreme good, they have made themselves unsuited for marriage." Blinzler is followed by H. Baltensweiler, *Die Ehe im Neuen Testament* (Zurich, 1967) pp. 107-10, by E. Schillebeeckx, *Celibacy*, tr. C. A. L. Jarrot (New York, 1968) pp. 21-25, and by J. Grelot, "La motivation évangélique du célibat," *Gregorianum* 53 (1972) 731-57. A choice for the causal interpretation cannot be made on the basis of purely lexical data. The causal meaning of *dia* is the rule, but it is not so causal as to exclude finality. The causality which it posits is not that of the purely efficient cause that impels an agent to act from behind himself, as it were. It can also denote the causality of a desirable end that moves the agent by bringing its own attractiveness to bear upon his imagination. See Oepke, "*Dia*," *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* 2 (1935-50) 68 f., Engl. tr. G. W. Bromiley 2 (1964) 69 f., and Blinzler, *art. cit.*, p. 261, n. 24. Note, however, that what is important in terms of this inquiry is not that the absence of a final meaning be established, but that the presence of a causal meaning be perceived, which should not be too difficult to do. An end yet to be attained exercises causality upon an agent only insofar as it has achieved presence in him through acts of representation and appreciation of its worthiness. The end yet unrealized needs to have happened to the self intramentally, if the self is to exert himself toward making it happen extramentally. It is in terms of this intramental happening of the kingdom that the decision for celibacy is accounted for here, and this is done in keeping with the causal meaning of *dia* and with the support of the context. Jesus does not speak of people who have renounced marriage, but of people who have made themselves incapable of marriage. Now renunciation of marriage is conceivable as emerging from the conviction that access to, or freedom for, the kingdom requires such renunciation, but disablement from, and incapacity for, marriage are not conceivable that way. Unless this disablement be an empty figure of speech or a cruel hyperbole, it needs to be interpreted in terms of an experience that has dispossessed the subject of a capacity otherwise in his possession. And since this experience has to do with the kingdom of heaven, it needs to be related to a self-affirmation of God's lordship of such comprehensiveness and depth that it exiles from the subject the capacity to envision marriage as a choice open to him. Nor can this interpretation be objected to by averting to the fact that the disablement of which Jesus speaks is self-inflicted ("who *made themselves* eunuchs . . ."). The reflexive locution performs its function by alerting to the fact that the disablement from marriage is not to be thought of as occurring apart from awareness and decision; for it is a disablement of the self, and no such disablement is a disablement until it be perceived by the self as his own condition, and taken upon oneself by ratification.

is intelligible as one that comes about within a major religious experience and as existential repercussion of it.¹³

THE DECISION FOR CELIBACY

The words by which Jesus makes his case for celibacy have a normative import even when interpreted in terms of the situation into which they were originally spoken. For Jesus does not merely maintain that celibacy has happened because of the kingdom, but that, since it has happened because of the kingdom, it had the right to happen and has the right to be. When Jesus' words come to be integrated into the Christian proclamation and begin to function as part of it, their normative import takes on additional intensity and a wider scope. They now announce an understanding of how celibacy ought to happen in the new dispensation whenever it is to be the genuine article.

The decisive element in this understanding is the contention that, if celibacy be arrived at by a decision to embrace it, this embrace exhibits a narrative structure of its own. It does not evoke itself forcibly out of a comparative assessment that balances the merits of celibacy against the merits of intimacy, and out of an estimate of the consequences to be expected and of the price to be paid. Should the decision for celibacy have to ride on the dynamics of a rational-ethical calculation, it would happen best to those who have most competently deluded themselves, for only he who exists in a state of self-induced delusion can claim control over an accumulation of data as large as required to reckon the personal

¹³Baltensweiler, *op. cit.*, p. 107, endorses this interpretation and offers a psychological description of the experience out of which celibacy emerges. The announcement of the kingdom evokes a joy so overwhelming as to exile the capacity for marriage. This description rehearses the motif that appears in the parables of the Lost Pearl and the Hidden Treasure (Mt 13:45, 44). In our own historical situation a shift from psychological to phenomenological description seems to be called for. What turns out to be the case now is less an invasion of joy unleashed by a piece of astounding good news than the advent of a quiet yet stubborn conviction. When the subject is present to himself, and the enterprise of existing as a man is present to the subject in its totality, the subject finds himself in a state of inability to constitute the meaning of that enterprise except as affirmation of God's lordship. An existential experience with this content can be called religious insofar as what is experienced in it is a form of absolute dependence, and absolute dependence is what is experienced in religious experience. On religious experience as the experience of absolute dependence, see F. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, tr. J. Oman (New York, 1958) esp. pp. 26-118; *The Christian Faith* 1, tr. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (New York, 1963) par. 3, 4, pp. 5-26; R. H. Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion* (New York, 1964) pp. 174-204; "Schleiermacher and the Names of God: A Consideration of Schleiermacher in Relation to our Theism," in R. W. Funk, ed., *Schleiermacher as Contemporary*, being Vol. 7 of the *Journal for Theology and the Church* (New York, 1970) 176-205; L. Dupré, "Toward a Revaluation of Schleiermacher's *Philosophy of Religion*," *Journal of Religion* 44 (1964) 97-112.

consequences of his own celibate choice. If that decision happens at all, it is because it has the power to happen apart from calculation, estimate, and assessment of merits, demerits, consequences, and costs, that is, in the act of a man's surrendering to the felt certainty that the decision cannot go the other way. It is this kind of certainty that is decisive in this decision, not the certainty that stems from comparative estimates. This is why it is more intelligible as ratification of a celibate condition that happens to be than as the transaction thanks to which that condition comes to be. And so, in a manner of speaking, it is not the man who chooses his own celibacy; it is rather celibacy that chooses its own man in the act of happening to him.

By and large, a parallel model presides over the decision for intimacy—and there are enough of those for us to infer that the model commands, in spite of its awkwardness, a substantial measure of social and ethical respectability. The two young people who walk down the aisle and say yes to each other, sanction by that yes an event that has already happened to both of them in relation to the other. In the course of time, coexistence in intimacy has become constituted in their consciousness as the only thinkable way of existing as persons. Likewise, the decision for celibacy emerges within people in the act of yielding to the certainty that celibacy has already happened to them, as the one mode of existence that makes sense to them.

This is why the celibate had better resign himself to his own inability to make a cogent case for his own decision for the benefit of anyone who means to play the part of a critic of the same. There is no reason in the world why he should even feel bound to oblige. But should he choose to try, he would promptly develop shortness of breath and scarcity of words. Like the lover called upon to disclose the why and the wherefore of it all, he would be trying to validate a decision the making of which does not command the cogency of a rational dialectic. Hence no case he might make for its rightness can achieve enough convincingness to satisfy the critic who is determined to have cogency or else.¹⁴

In the light of this understanding of the decision for celibacy, the symbol of celibacy as gift given and received turns out to be a truthful specification of experience. The symbol is traditional, and still very much in demand when celibacy is commended in official documents.¹⁵

¹⁴ See R. O. Johann, *The Meaning of Love* (Westminster, Md., 1959) p. 11.

¹⁵ The symbol appears, e.g., in Vatican II: *Lumen gentium*, no. 42 ("that precious gift of divine grace which the Father gives to some men"); *Optatam totius*, no. 10 ("a precious gift which should be humbly sought of God"); *Perfectae caritatis*, no. 12 ("a surpassing gift of grace"); *Presbyterorum ordinis*, no. 16 ("the gift of celibacy, which so befits the priesthood . . . this surpassing gift"). This last text reappears in the Encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis caelibatus* (June 24, 1967), tr. United States Catholic Conference, no. 44.

But there are also people who find the symbol supremely obnoxious and react to the matter-of-fact use of it by visiting upon the user irreverent questions about the ethic of that use. If celibacy be a gift, who is the giver? And if you answer that the Holy Spirit is the giver, they probe further and ask to what purpose the Holy Spirit would want to drop "a blight of impotence" on anyone who happens to be looking the other way.¹⁶ This is not, as a rule, the kind of rude questioning the symbol of celibacy as gift evokes among celibates, but even among them one discovers people who find the symbol out of touch with reality as present to them in their experience of it. Try as they may, they cannot recall having experienced anything resembling the reception of a gift when they made their decision for celibacy. This is true, but only in part, for the structure of that decision does reveal the participation of a giver. The certainty from which it emerges is without a doubt a modification of self-consciousness, yet this modification is not a state which the self engineers by his own resources. In the act of being present to himself, the celibate is aware of having been posited, not of having posited himself, into a state of inability to go the other way. To the extent to which celibacy bespeaks dependence on a whence beyond one's ken and control, it has the quality of a given. The symbol of gift brings that givenness to language.¹⁷

THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY

The preceding considerations were meant to answer the question that asks what sort of an event the decision for celibacy is, who makes it happen to whom, and how. The answer is yet incomplete, for it fails to take into account the fact that, for all its privacy, the decision for celibacy is not totally private. It does indeed ground itself on certainties

See also Paul VI, *Evangelica testificatio* (June 29, 1971), tr. United States Catholic Conference, no. 15, and Pius XII, *On Holy Virginity*, tr. National Catholic Welfare Conference, no. 10, with a variation in no. 2 ("perpetual virginity is a very noble gift which the Christian religion has bestowed on the world").

¹⁶R. Reuther, "The Ethic of Celibacy," *Commonweal*, Feb. 2, 1973, p. 390.

¹⁷The interpretation does justice to the symbol, and the symbol so interpreted does justice to the narrative structure of what it seeks to interpret. The symbol turns instead into a caricature and an offense when it makes of celibacy an article bestowed by a giver ready-made and once for all. It is perhaps some such aberration that enrages people who demand to know whether the finished article is to be thought of as a "blight of impotence," or as a secret "lowering of . . . natural libido," or as "a heavy trip of sexual fear." See Reuther, *art. cit.*, p. 390. Such derisions are gratuitous nonsense if celibacy be taken to be a gift in the sense that it "is introduced by God into the concrete anthropological and psychological situation of a human life, and so has a history of its own." Thus F. Wulf in his commentary on *Perfectae caritatis* in H. Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II 2* (New York, 1968) 358.

that could not be more private than they are, since they are modifications of self-consciousness. Yet the self that has come by these certainties has not been traveling unattended. He has been surrounded by a community which has played all along a participant role in the process whereby the decision was made. To the extent to which this role has made a difference, it is true to say that the community has made the decision for celibacy to happen to its members. This role needs now be explored more carefully.¹⁸ The reader will soon notice a partial shift from a descriptive to a prescriptive emphasis. The main concern in what follows is not the straight intelligibility of the community's role, but the grasp of what that role ought to be in order to be intelligible. And the position to be defended here is that the community can and ought to play a participant role in the process that issues in the decision for celibacy, and that it plays that role intelligibly and intelligently if it exert itself chiefly in two directions: first, if it strive to afford the young in formation an ecology within which their decision for celibacy has a good chance to happen validly; second, if it seek to contribute, not to the making of the decision itself, but to the validity of it.

The Favorable Ecology

Only little can be said here with regard to the field of interpersonal experience which the community ought to provide. Only experts who command a reliable understanding of the possibilities canonically and otherwise available can trust themselves to make prudential judgments as to which possibilities will best serve the purpose for which they are to be made available. Here only a viewpoint can be expressed which experts might want to consider as they labor over decisions and policies.

Not so long ago decisions concerning the ecology to be provided for the young in formation were traceable to the conviction that the candidate who had walked up the hill and knocked at the door of the monastery, begging for admittance, was not only unattached but had already made his decision for celibacy. There are reasons to wonder whether this assumption was ever correct, especially in countries where youngsters with a minimum of barnyard psychosocial experience were welcomed as

¹⁸ While community and community life have occasioned reflection and discussion in our midst, the formative role of the community as community has received only scanty attention. Even large dissertations about religious life, such as E. Gambari's *Manuale della vita religiosa alla luce del Vaticano II* (2 vols.; Rome, 1970-71), fail to address themselves to this question. See, however, E. Bozzo, "Being-toward-Community: Essence of Religious Life," *Review for Religious* 29 (1970) 719-28; G. Wilson, "Community . . . and Loneliness," *ibid.* 29 (1970) 3-15; J. A. Bracken, "Community and Religious Life," *ibid.* 31 (1972) 732-41; F. Wulf, "Zur Anthropologie von Zölibat und Jungfräulichkeit," *Geist und Leben* 36 (1963) 352-60.

highly desirable recruits. Be that as it may, the assumption has only a slight chance to be valid today. Candidates who apply for admittance in our time do indeed command a measure of experience that lends them considerable competency. The fact of this competency is not, however, a sufficient reason to conclude that they have been grasped by the lordship of God so uncompromisingly that all other concerns have gone out of them. It is safer to assume instead that their decision for celibacy is in the making and that they look upon the formation period as the time within which this decision will hopefully come to fruition.

If this be the correct assumption, the ecology that matches the situation is not one so clinically controlled, vacuum-packed, and germ-free as to exclude in principle interpersonal encounter and interaction. If the decision for celibacy is still in the making, and the making of it has the narrative structure described earlier, opportunities for encounter belong normatively to the quality of the ecology within which the decision is to be made. Which opportunities ought to be made available, in what measure, with what frequency, and what be the proper use to be made of them, these are questions that call for expert prudential judgment and community discernment. But it should not be amiss to suggest that in this whole matter the communal psyche should resolve to wear a smile. If the situation entails risks, as it certainly does, the risks are worth taking, since they do belong to the normative dynamics of the decision in the making. And the youths who grow overassiduous, overcompetent, and oversuccessful in the profession and practice of encounter are thereby hinting to themselves and their peers that the signals of transcendence to which they are responding do not proceed from the transcendent loveliness of the Lord of hosts. With the passing of time these signals of transcendence will either take on additional specification and transform themselves into a self-fulfilling prophecy, or fade out of the horizon under the impact of certainties that can neither be ignored nor denied.

Distinctive Criteriology

More can be said about the contribution which the community ought to make to the validity of the decision for celibacy on the part of its members in formation. A first contribution consists in guiding them toward the realization that the criteriology upon which the decision for celibacy depends for its rightness is peculiar. As much as any other decision, this decision can turn out to be valid or invalid, but validity cannot be insured in this case by bringing to bear upon the making of the decision the style of object-centered validation that applies to moral decisions generally. When a choice is made between two alternatives, the moral validity of the choice is traceable to the objective rightness of whatever is being chosen in that choice. The witness who elects to tell the

truth in court makes a valid choice because veracity is right in itself and mendacity is wrong. But when celibacy is chosen over against intimacy, the rightness of celibacy is not competent to lend validity to the decision for it. The in-itself rightness being credited to celibacy is inherent to intimacy as well. This means that the decision for celibacy has not been validated at all when the validation process has been of the deductive and object-centered variety: celibacy is right for me because it is right in itself. In the very next breath the very same reasoning would validate the decision for intimacy: intimacy is right for me because it is right in itself. This means that what ought to count decisively for people on the way to celibacy is not the ghostly extrapolation "celibacy-in-itself" but the concrete historical configuration which they themselves turn out to be when they become present to themselves. If celibacy is to be right for those who make the decision for it, it will not be because it is right in itself but because they are right for it. And they are right for it if it has happened to them in the way it should. More precisely: it is the quality of the events from which the decision for celibacy emerges, not the quality of celibacy itself, that validates the quality of the decision for celibacy and celibacy itself.

Spiritual Direction

The community which has already alerted its members in formation to this style of validation ought to come in a second time and offer them the guidance they need to achieve self-understanding and to advance from self-understanding to self-determination. A young man in quest of self-understanding can count it as a singular grace, should he happen to discover among his peers an older brother who has struggled toward self-understanding on his own and who has neither forgotten the agony of that struggle nor pretends that he has for the sake of playing a role or sustaining a dignity. Yet another qualification is indispensable: the older brother needs to have mastered the art of listening-for-understanding. This is the listening people do when their primary intention is not to pass judgment on what they hear nor to perceive and answer questions, but to understand the speaker through the understanding of what he says. This kind of listening holds out the promise of a quasi-sacramental efficacy, for it evokes self-revelation and "self-revelation is at the same time self-discovery."¹⁹ Because we are persons only in relation to persons, we

¹⁹ Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, p. 170. He continues: "This may sound paradoxical, yet it is a commonplace of personal experience. In no field of knowledge is anything really known until it is expressed; and to express knowledge is to put it in the form of a communication." See also D. O'Connor, "John Macmurray: Primacy of the Personal," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 4 (1964) 464-84; R. O. Johann, "Subjectivity," *Review of Metaphysics* 12 (1958) 200-234; "Knowledge, Commitment, and the Real," in V.

are dependent on others even for our understanding of ourselves as persons. We understand ourselves when someone hears us out and through what we say, understands what we are. We begin to move self-intelligibly in our own world by our own powers when that world and those powers have been illumined and certified by the understanding and the recognition others have extended to them.

This interpersonal situation is traditionally named spiritual direction.²⁰ The above description of the dynamics of it implies a position as to the goal which spiritual direction ought to pursue when the decision for celibacy is at stake. To steer the young toward that decision does not seem to be the proper thrust, but to assist them to achieve understanding of their own historicity, the understanding they need in order to make that decision validly on their own. Here, then, spiritual direction is an enlarged form of self-inquiry for self-understanding, not a substitute for either self-inquiry or self-understanding or both.

In addition to individual guidance, the community ought to offer general criteria in terms of which its members in formation may take counsel with themselves and insure validity for their decision for celibacy. This is not going to be a sinecure, for such criteria need to be first discerned by the community, then deliberated upon either through debate or dialogue, and finally adopted. The road to discernment, and from discernment to consensus, is a long one, especially when the agenda calls for the determination of something as elusive and as emotionally charged as the criteria that certify the decision for celibacy.²¹ The suggestions collected under the next two titles are not meant to spare the community the labors of discernment or to supersede the results such labors may already have achieved. They aim only at initiating and promoting reflection.

F. Daues *et al.*, eds., *Wisdom in Depth: Essays in Honor of Henri Renard, S. J.* (Milwaukee, 1966) pp. 112-25; J. de Finance, "Being and Subjectivity," *Cross Currents* (1956) 163-78.

²⁰ See A. van Kaam, "Religious Counseling of Seminarians," in J. M. Lee and L. J. Putz, eds., *Seminary Education in a Time of Change* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1965) pp. 328-52; C. A. Curran, *Counseling in Catholic Life and Education* (New York, 1952).

²¹ The difficulties entailed in the understanding and practice of community discernment appear distinctly in four issues of the *Studies on the Spirituality of Jesuits* published by the American Assistancy Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality (St. Louis, Mo.) and dedicated to community discernment: J. C. Futrell, "Ignatian Discernment," 2:2 (April 1970) 47-88; J. Toner, "A Method for Communal Discernment of God's Will," 3:4 (September 1971) 121-52; J. C. Futrell, "Communal Discernment: Reflections on Experience," 4:5 (November 1972) 159-92; L. Orsy, "Toward a Theological Evaluation of Communal Discernment," 5:5 (October 1973) 139-88. See also J. Maloney, "The Spirit and Moral Discernment in Aquinas," *Heythrop Journal* 13 (1972) 282-97; "The Spirit and Community Discernment" *ibid.* 14 (1973) 147-61; W. Peters, "Discernment: Doubts," *Review for Religious* 32 (1973) 814-17.

A Negative Criterion

Community consensus may not be an impossible achievement nowadays with regard to this negative criterion: the decision for celibacy limps ominously when it traces its origins to the disparagement of sex. From this source there is bound to come a celibacy that rates as a delicate condition rather than as an adult strength. This does not mean that a celibate armor so constituted will promptly develop metal fatigue, show pelvic cracks, and fall apart. The delicate condition may turn out to be a durable one, but durability is neither quality nor an index of quality. Regardless of its prehistory, the disparagement of sex is a misfortune and a debility. It would be a first-class psychosocial miracle if a celibacy that draws its strength from this debility were itself a strength for the self and a blessing for others.

Disparagement of sex refers to a conclave of biases, prejudices, anxieties, morbidities, mythologies, and mystifications that rendezvous under the same umbrella because they all share in a common misery: the inability to subscribe to the proposition that the sexual is human and the human is sexual.²² The sexual appears instead as a system on the move, self-contained and self-propelled, which defeats in the end the best efforts at structuring it into the human configuration without residue. An absurd residue is always left which cannot be negotiated except by some form of pretense: pretending that it is not there, or that it does not matter after all, or that repression will suppress it.²³

²²The equation is biblical, for it asserts in the language of being and identity what Gn 1:27c asserts in the language of the mythic recital. To say that God created the human in the act of bringing to being human configurations sexually differentiated and complementary is the same as saying that, in the divine mind, the human exists only as a configuration sexually differentiated and that the sexual differentiation is a dimension of humanness—no more, no less.

²³This description is distilled mainly from the history of Gnosticism and Manicheism and of the orthodox confrontation with them. At the core of Gnosticism there acts itself out a virulent strain of pelvic anxiety, which is another name for the disparagement of sex. The advocacy of promiscuity in left-wing Gnosticism, the exaltation of total continence in right-wing Gnosticism, and the eschatological dream of an androgynous humanity are desperate expressions of the same inability to be reconciled to the humanness of sex and the sexuality of the human. These aberrations are repudiated by the orthodox Fathers, but not so radically as to make a conclusive case for the total acceptance of the sexual. The best orthodoxy could manage was to evince the acceptability of sex out of its procreative usefulness. The biblical insight that integrates the sexual into the human, not in terms of its usefulness to humans but in terms of itself, remains inoperative in the confrontation. The same is true of the confrontation to follow between the Manichean mythology and Augustine's orthodoxy. A large dose of pelvic anxiety troubles both parties in the confrontation. When the confrontation comes to an end, the anxiety has found a permanent and honorable home in Augustine's theology of the primeval condition, the Fall, original sin and the transmission of it, and marital morality. On the history of the Gnostic and Manichean confrontation with orthodoxy, see J. T. Noonan, Jr., *Contraception* (Cam-

The disparagement of sex becomes directly relevant to the decision for celibacy when it takes on specification, surfaces as devaluation of womanhood, and delivers its homily against the feminine principle. As the homily reaches its climax, it announces the resolve not to let that principle trespass into the citadel of the masculine spirit, lest it should squander the riches of the same by investing them into the celebration of life and the cultivation of tenderness.²⁴ When this or a similar kind of reasoning accounts for the decision for celibacy, the validity of that decision leaves much to be desired. It is safe to assume that the celibacy emerging from that decision carries in its fabric the blight of its origins.

It is difficult to tell whether the religious community is ready to countenance the position taken here and embody it into the guidance it will offer to its members in formation. After looking in all directions for viewpoints, opinions, and preferences, the community may have to conclude that prudence, if not wisdom, is still on the side of a no-position position. Be that as it may, it is clear that we have been traveling for some time toward the recognition that illusions may ground a sturdy celibacy but not a good one. Official directives on religious and priestly formation, for example, are no longer silent or inarticulate. The *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis* (January 6, 1970) stresses the need to afford young candidates for the priesthood "adequate education in matters of sex" so that they may enjoy "psychological freedom both external and internal" when they make their decision for celibacy, together with an adequate measure of "emotional stability." Psychological freedom is a large order. It can certainly be taken to include freedom

bridge, Mass., 1965) pp. 56-106 and 107-39. For a nonhistorical description of the disparagement of sex, see M. Oraison, *The Human Mystery of Sexuality* (New York, 1967) esp. pp. 44-45 ("Sexuality and Religious Uneasiness"). Another way, roundabout yet effective, to perceive the disparagement of sex *in actu* is to survey the history of the efforts made by Western theologians in order to carve out a thinkable place for the spontaneity, playfulness, and pleasurable of sex. Beneath this history of a stubborn moral problem there lies the history of an intractable cultural anxiety ultimately traceable to the conviction that sexual pleasure as such is irredeemable, hence contemptible. The history in question has been researched by E. F. Sheridan, but only a segment of this research is available in print (*The Morality of the Pleasure Motive in the Use of Marriage* [Rome, 1947]). For a summary presentation of the findings of this research, extending also to the unpublished segments of it, see J. C. Ford and G. Kelly, *Contemporary Moral Theology 2: Marriage Questions* (Westminster, Md., 1964) 169-87, esp. 179 ff. See also C. Gallagher, "Sexual Pleasure: Its Proper Setting in Christian Marriage," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 146 (1962) 315-26, and "Concupiscence," *Thomist* 30 (1966) 228-59.

²⁴ This roughly paraphrases Augustine's discourse in *Soliloquia* 1, 10, 17 (*PL* 32, 878): "nihil esse sentio quod magis ex arce dejiciat animum virilem, quam blandimenta feminea, corporumque ille contactus, sine quo uxor haberi non potest." A few lines later Augustine announces his decision for celibacy: "Quamobrem, satis, credo, juste atque utiliter pro libertate animae meae mihi imperavi non cupere, non quaerere, non ducere uxorem."

from subconscious coercion. Disparagement of sex and devaluation of womanhood take on the quality of subconscious coercion when the decision for celibacy is in the making. When they impinge on the making of that decision, celibacy cannot be appreciated and lived "as personal fulfilment."²⁵

The Program of Priestly Formation, the American companion piece of the *Ratio fundamentalis*, calls for "an open and honest attitude towards celibacy, sex, and love," and sees in these attitudes "an abiding stimulus towards growth in holiness. . . ." Even more to the point is the contention that the celibacy of a candidate ought not to rest "on a disordered failure to appreciate women and his natural attraction to them." It can only grow out of and together with "his esteem and admiration of women. . . ."²⁶ The distance between this position and the homily against the feminine principle referred to above is difficult to miss.

A Positive Criterion

Is there a positive criterion which the religious community might trust itself to offer the young in formation for their own validation of their decision for celibacy? By various acts of transformational hermeneutics an answer to this question has grown out of Jesus' formula "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" and has taken possession of the communal imagination as part of a normative spiritual folklore. Thanks to this hermeneutics, the statement which declares that there are celibates who have made themselves such for the kingdom of heaven resurfaces with the value of a two-pronged stipulation. It now declares, on the one hand, that celibacy for the sake of the kingdom is a value, and, on the other, that the decision for celibacy for the sake of the kingdom is a valid decision. An act of legitimizing hermeneutics is then performed to disclose the ground on which both stipulations rest: celibacy is a condition that must be fulfilled if the affirmation of God's lordship is to be total, for it is because celibacy bears this necessary relation to God's lordship that it is a value and that the decision for celibacy is a valid decision.

By and large, this is the position the religious community might be expected to take if the question about a positive criterion for the

²⁵Text in *Acta apostolicae sedis* 62 (1970) 354 (no. 48): "Ut autem electio caelibatus vere libera sit, requiritur ut iuvenis evangelicam huius doni vim luce fidei perspicere possit, idemque bona status matrimonialis recte aestimet. Plena etiam gaudeat libertate psychologica interna atque externa, atque necessarium gradum maturitatis affectivae possideat, ita ut caelibatus tamquam suae personae completionem sentire atque vivere possit."

²⁶National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Program of Priestly Formation* (Washington, D.C., 1971) p. 36, nos. 150-52.

validation of the decision for celibacy should be raised in its midst. Should one press on and inquire which are the grounds on which the validity of the position rests, the community might have to overcome its own bewilderment before discerning the answer. In the end the answer will probably be that the position draws its validity from two sources of validity: the authority of Jesus and the authority of self-evidence. The authority of Jesus guarantees the validity of the formula that supplies the positive criterion, hence the validity of the criterion itself. The authority of self-evidence guarantees the validity of the contention in terms of which Jesus' formula is interpreted, namely, that celibacy bears to the kingdom the relation of a necessary condition. For can it not be taken as self-evident that, apart from a celibate mode of life, only a part-time affirmation of God's lordship is possible? A supplementary reference to Paul's words in 1 Cor 7:32-35 might surface at this point to lend biblical sanction to the cogency of obviousness.

It appears upon reflection that the position just outlined can be credited only with a questionable validity. The two lines of reasoning out of which it grows are made to carry excessive weight. They collapse along the way, long before they issue into the conclusion they are meant to establish. In the first place, there is the authority of Jesus. If Jesus defended and commended celibacy "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven," it seems legitimate at first to maintain that, when celibacy is being chosen as a way of life for the sake of the kingdom, the choice is validated by Jesus' own authority. Because of that authority the man who has made the celibate choice seems entitled to be sure that he has made it validly. Yet this piece of reasoning fails to deliver a valid conclusion, because it misconstrues the thrust of Jesus' commendation of celibacy. There is no question that in the mind of Jesus celibacy bears a connection to the kingdom and that it is commendable because of this connection. Yet, if a man's decision for celibacy is to claim validity for itself on the authority of Jesus, it must bear to the kingdom precisely the one connection which Jesus envisages when he relates celibacy to kingdom. Now the earlier discussion of the Matthean logion has shown what that connection is like. In the mind of Jesus, the decision for celibacy stands related to the kingdom as that *because of which* this decision happens to people, not as that *for the sake of which* people make this decision happen to themselves. Or, to put it differently, the kingdom of God does not relate to the decision for celibacy insofar as the kingdom is an event to happen in the future and *for the sake of which* people are called upon to renounce marriage in the present, but as an event which has already happened to people in the past and *because of which* the capacity to envision their own future in terms of marriage has gone out of them. In

other words, Jesus speaks here the language of realized eschatology.²⁷ He envisions the celibate life of his followers, not as a condition to which they must submit for the sake of bringing God's lordship to presence in the world, but as a mode in which this very presence has already affirmed itself in them. Hence, in Jesus' mind, what makes celibacy a value and validates the decision for celibacy is that both celibacy and the decision for it are realizations of God's lordship, not means to effect that realization. It is that lordship that has induced in a man that particular form of disablement from marriage that consists in the inability to think of it as an understanding of life that makes sense for oneself. The surgical metaphor of eunuchry (translated here into a bland "disablement from marriage") has enough of a cutting edge to make it plain to anyone that, if marriage be out of the question for the people of whom Jesus speaks, it is not because they have decided to renounce it for the sake of achieving something that cannot be achieved except through this renunciation, but because marriage is contingent on the possibility of itself, and that possibility is itself contingent on the presence of a prerequisite which in them happens to be absent. In the metaphor, the prerequisite that is not there is physical integrity; in reality, it is existential integrity. Marriage is unavailable to people in whose imagination it refuses to mirror itself as meaningful enough to be thinkable as their own way of life.²⁸

If such be the thrust of Jesus' commendation of celibacy, it will not do to say that a decision for celibacy is validated by Jesus' own authority, whenever it is made in order to attend full-time to the errand of the Lord. The authority of Jesus is on the side of the man who can truthfully say that he has decided for celibacy because the lordship of God has taken possession of his inner space so uncompromisingly as to make him unavailable for marriage.

In the second place, there is the authority of self-evidence, the self-evidence of the contention that only a celibate mode of life allows for a full-time affirmation of God's lordship. Here the argument from

²⁷ The expression is borrowed from C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London, 1935/52) pp. 30-80, esp. 50 f. See also J. Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (New York, 1953) pp. 197, 237, and J. Bowman, "Eschatology of the N. T.," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 2, 135-40, esp. 136b. The use of this expression does not imply a choice between the conflicting interpretations of Jesus' eschatological teaching. Whatever position may be taken in this controversy, it is clear that Jesus relates the celibacy of his disciples and his own to an event located in the past. Note the contrast between the present "there are . . ." and the aorist "who made themselves eunuchs . . ."

²⁸ Baltensweiler, *op. cit.*, p. 109: "Jesus does not speak of absence of marriage (*Ehelosigkeit*) or of renunciation of marriage (*Eheverzicht*) but of *unfitness for marriage* (*Eheuntauglichkeit*). To his opponents he says that he and his disciples are being so grasped by the reality of the kingdom of heaven that they are 'unfit' for marriage." See also Blinzler, *art. cit.*, p. 261.

authority collapses, because it rides on an indefensible God-world dialectic. It is being assumed that God and world are two univocal masters poised in competition one against the other, so that they cannot be served except one at a time, by distinct and separate investments of fidelity, hence at each other's expense. Admittedly, a man who lives out his life within the complex web of secular responsibilities invests only a minor share of his time in pursuits that qualify as exclusively religious. However, his dedication to God does not have to be part-time, since it is precisely in the act of doing justice to inescapable secular demands that the Christian meets with the opportunity and the obligation to bear witness to the ultimacy of God. The time invested in the discharge of secular obligations does not have to be subtracted from the time given to God. If so, just as it is not self-evident that celibacy is by itself a total affirmation of God, so too it is not self-evident that apart from celibacy such affirmation is out of the question. It follows in conclusion that a decision for celibacy that grows out of the superseded dialectic of a God-world dichotomy, and appeals to that dialectic to ground its own validity, is invalidly grounded. There lies at the core of this style of validation the fatal weakness which E. Schillebeeckx has pointed out so forcefully: "Celibacy is not the sort of thing that one can take on because one has to along with something else."²⁹ Because celibacy rests its validity on a proud logic of its own, it does not welcome efforts that seek to establish that validity by contending that celibacy is valid because it is a condition required for the attainment of something other than itself. Such unsolicited and alien legitimations are all the more drastically rejected whenever the legitimating reasoning proves to be itself illegitimate, that is, sophistical. And this is the case, to be sure, when the "something else" for the sake of which celibacy is to be "taken on" is the affirmation of the lordship of God. The reasoning is sophistical since that affirmation can be realized apart from celibacy.

If this critique is on the mark, it is in order to suggest at this point that the time has come to let the for-the-sake-of style of validation drift to the edge of the horizon and out of sight. The religious community should refrain from instructing its members in formation that their decision for celibacy will surely be valid if they are impelled to make it by the strength of the conviction that they must in order to achieve a total dedication to the lordship of God. As genuine as this conviction might be, the strength of it is deceptive because artificially contrived. Sooner or later it is bound to disintegrate under the impact of data which will convince the celibate that he has fallen between the two stools of a false

²⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 126; also pp. 21-25 ("A Biblical Fact: 'Existential Inability to Do Otherwise'") and pp. 120-29 ("Dialectical Tension between the Datum of 'Existential Inability to Do Otherwise' and the Juridical Law of Celibacy").

either/or dialectic. Married Christians will appear on the scene whose loyalty to God he would not dare to call anything but total, even though they are forever busy taking seriously a host of secular duties and trying to do justice to them. In the act of responding to the demands that come to them from the world, they do affirm God's lordship over themselves, over life in the world, and over the world itself.

Are we to conclude, then, that there is no positive criterion which the religious community could endorse and suggest to the young for their guidance? The words of Jesus as interpreted earlier do embody such a criterion. If Jesus links the advent of celibacy to the advent of the kingdom, and more precisely to the existential inability to marry, it follows that this state of inability is the criterion that validates the decision for celibacy. This means that the crucial questions celibates on the way to a decision for celibacy ought to ask themselves are two: whether they are present to themselves in this state of existential disablement from marriage, and whether this disablement is traceable, not to a devaluation of marriage and womanhood, but to the uncompromising quality of the concern for God by which they have been overtaken. If the answer to both questions is in the affirmative, the religious in formation finds himself in the situation of those celibates of whom Jesus speaks. The defense and commendation which he extends to their celibacy applies to his own.

It hardly needs mentioning that the suggested criterion is of no easy application. The two questions that make it up are difficult to answer, more difficult to be sure than the question whether one considers celibacy to be the indispensable condition of one's total affirmation of God's lordship. The answer to them can only grow out of acts of self-scrutiny distributed over a period of years. At the beginning of religious life the existential disablement here in question may register only faintly, as content of a recurrent intimation, with varying degrees of assurance in it. As time goes by and experience contributes more data to the initial accumulation, the intimation tests its own solidity time and again, until it either takes on enough assurance to rate as a moral certainty or enough weakness to be driven out of the way by rival intimations and certainties. The testing process comes thus to an end, and the stage is set for that act of self-transcendence which is the decision for celibacy.³⁰

³⁰This is not to say that, once the decision for celibacy has been made, the possibility of doubting the validity of that decision vanishes and that self-scrutiny becomes forever superfluous. Doubt remains possible, because the conviction on which a man grounds his decision for celibacy has to do with his disablement from marriage, and this is a modification of consciousness subject to further modifications. Hence the decision that has emerged from that modification should not be thought of as so final as to exclude the need of having to be finalized again and again.

Does the proposed criterion command enough convincingness to be entitled to a role in the guidance to be offered to the young in formation? The answer is still uncertain, for the formula "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" enjoys tenure in the communal imagination, and the style of validation which has grown out of it claims, in addition to tenure, the transparency of rational dialectic. All the same, a change is no longer unthinkable, for the original import of the tenured formula has been shown not to support the style of validation grounded on it. Besides, the rational dialectic that commends that style has been exploded as deceptive.

CONCLUSION

It does not seem proper to leave the scene of this inquiry without adverting to the strange paradox into which one lands oneself when taking the position taken here, namely, that the decision for celibacy represents a favorable resolution of the crisis of intimacy. By all known standards of valuation this crisis is favorably resolved when a young man's emergent capacity for intimacy converts itself into commitment and fidelity to the woman of his choice. It is this commitment and this fidelity, and the reciprocation of them, that afford a man the certification of his manhood and the adult strength that thrives on that certification. When the crisis of intimacy is resolved in favor of celibacy, commitment, certification, and the strength consequent upon these are excluded. In what sense, then, is such a resolution favorable? Who is being favored by it? These inevitable questions call on reflection to shift from the way in which the decision for celibacy happens, and the criteria that insure its validity, to the value of what that decision brings into the scene, namely, celibacy itself. The questions that now come to occupy center stage are whether celibacy confers any recognizable strength to the religious as a person, any coherence and quality to his life, any effectiveness to his ministry and witness. The issue raised by these questions exceeds the scope of this inquiry, but it does not seem out of order to bring this inquiry to an end by noting that this issue emerges from it.