

# A SECRET WORLD

Sexuality and the Search  
for Celibacy —

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### 5. Integration

There is something mystic about men who have integrated celibacy firmly and unequivocally into their being and behavior. The awareness of the transcendent in themselves and others, past and future, comes together in them and in their work. At times, they do record moments that might be called ecstatic or classed as spiritual peak experiences, but the real test of their resolve is in their daily lives. They have a spiritual transparency—they indeed are what they seem to be. They are not without the faults or idiosyncrasies developed in pursuing a rarefied form of existence and service. But they also typify what is written about in the literature as a true eschatological witness. These men point to life beyond and to values not yet achieved. They have triumphed as much as humans can over the biological imperative. They exercise a freedom of service to their fellow humans unbound by any institutional restraints. They are what they set out to be: men of God.

It is easier to find men who will relate their celibate/sexual struggles than it is to find men who can talk in the first person about their achievements and integration. This in part is because integration is accompanied by a deep sense of humility and in part is because these men are a minority. The tendency to deal with celibacy only in idealistic and legalistic terms rather than in terms of process and personal history militates against a realistic literature that genuinely supports celibacy. These men both validate the process and approach the ideal.

We need more direct witness from these men. For me to become more biographical at this point would expose the best examples to recognition against their wishes. It is my hope that this formulation of a model of celibacy will encourage more celibates to expose the process of their own search. What I do know from the few men in the study who can unquestionably be categorized as having integrated celibacy beyond all of its stages is that they have transcended the self to a level beyond sexuality, when "male and female, and also Jew and Greek" no longer have meaning.

## Chapter 13

# THE ACHIEVEMENT OF CELIBACY

*What would happen if men remained loyal to the  
ideals of their youth?*

—Ignazio Silone, *Bread and Wine*

*If you had cut Andrew Pengilly to the core, you  
would have found him white clear through. He was a  
type of clergyman favored in pious fiction, yet he actually did exist.*

—Sinclair Lewis, *Elmer Gantry*

Classical literature about celibacy is fraught with presuppositions about the achievement of the ideal. The assumption that the ideal-achieved is the ordinary state is the starting point of most presentations. The reality of this assumption is not so easily taken for granted by the serious practitioner of celibacy. "How is it possible?" was a question posed by many students in their last years of training for the priesthood. The majority of our informants are witness to a stretch for the ideal rather than a firm grasp on it.

This report has tried to avoid assumptions in favor of an accurate portrayal of the state of celibacy as it exists. We remain convinced that such a representation is more supportive of those who strive for the fulfillment of the ideal than are depictions that avoid the real difficulty in its attainment or that offer simple ascetic schemes for success.

At any one time, 2 percent of vowed celibate clergy can be said to have achieved celibacy—that is, they have successfully negotiated each step of celibate development at the more or less appropriate stage and are characterologically so firmly established that their state is, for all intents and purposes, irreversible. These truly are the eunuchs of whom Christ spoke in the New Testament (Matt. 19:12). Even more, they are from among that group who have made the decision for celibacy, as Balducelli (1975) describes it, from the beginning, surmounting the crisis of intimacy in favor of celibacy; the crisis of responsibility resolved by community; and the crisis of integrity resolved by permanent commitment (pp. 219–242).

There is also a group of men, 6 to 8 percent, who, although their course of celibate practice has not been without its missteps and fumbings and, for some, serious reversals in the past, enjoys a present condition so refined and in which the practice of celibacy is so firmly established that the group can be said to have consolidated the practice of celibacy to such a degree that it approaches the ideal.

This group represents those who clearly have the charism of celibacy. It also includes brave, courageous, and devoted men who say that, although they feel they lacked the charism, they have embraced—even if at times unenthusiastically—the discipline required by a church they love because of a work they truly feel is their own.

Even the reader who is accustomed to think only in terms of the ideal may be open to considering the realism of these figures if he or she recalls that these groups are added to the 40 percent estimated to be practicing celibacy (Figure 13:1).

The average person is not scandalized by the portrayal of clerics by Chaucer (1934 ed.) in *The Canterbury Tales*. The Monk has an aversion to the quiet and seclusion of his monastery, and he is consumed with his interest in material things, good food, and worldly pleasures. Chaucer's Friar is frankly evil and cunning—using the confessions he hears as a ruse for financial profit. Another implication is clear—he is sexually familiar with another man's wife. The Pardoner, that special envoy of Roman power, is drawn as an unattractive homosexual. The nun's priest betrays his vanity and vacuousness in his story of the cock and the fox. The canon's alchemy and duplicity are exposed by his yeoman.

None of these characters is unbelievable and each has his parallel in modern-day ministry. However, just as true to life is the Oxford cleric—the serious student who aspires to the ministry and church office—and the Parson—the poor and devoted parish priest, of whom Chaucer says:

This fine example to his flock he gave,  
That first he wrought and afterwards he taught;  
Out of the gospel then that text he caught,  
And this figure he added thereunto—  
That, if gold rust, what shall poor iron do?  
For it the priest be foul, in whom we trust,  
What wonder if a layman yield to lust?  
And shame it is, if priest take thought for keep,  
A shitty shepherd, shepherding clean sheep.  
Well ought a priest example good to give,  
By his own cleanness, how his flock should live. . . .

# Celibate/Sexual Adjustment

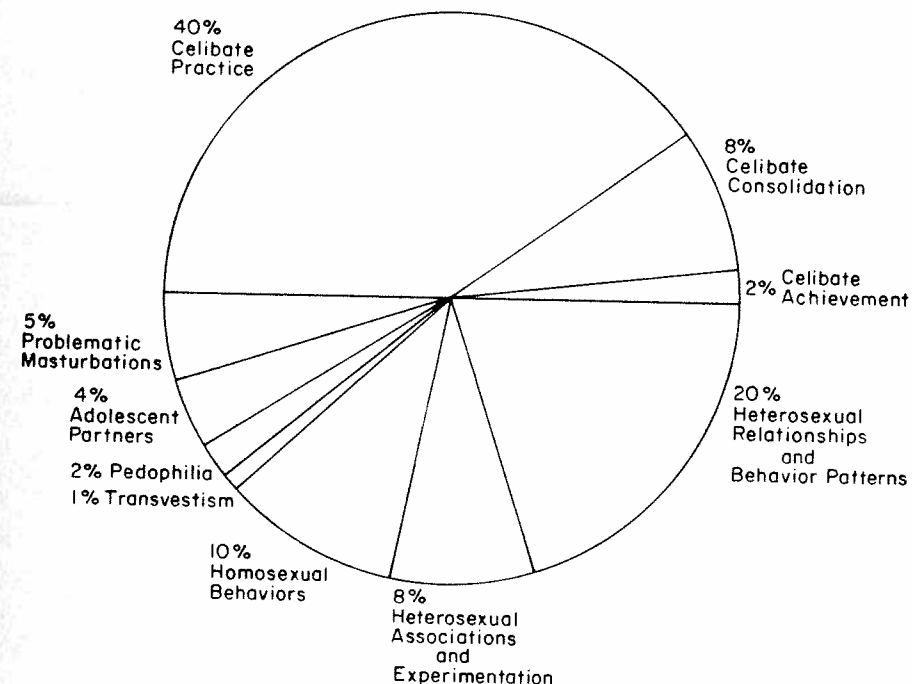


FIGURE 13:1. Celibate/Sexual Adjustment: Estimates of Behavior

There is nowhere a better priest, I trowe.  
He had no thirst for pomp or reverence,  
Nor made himself a special, spiced conscience,  
But Christ's own love, and His apostles' twelve,  
He taught, but first he followed it himself. (pp. 16–17)

The questions remain: Who are the men who succeed in celibacy? How do they approach the ideal of celibacy? What is involved in their success?

Over the years, I have found them to be almost universally humble and very reticent about claiming "success" for themselves. Contrary to what might be expected, I found in them that a sense of humanness and flexibility of character were far more common than rigidity. Also remarkable was their general sense of good humor rather than the wizened anger and resentment some might expect among sexually deprived persons.

A discipline and purposefulness were evident in their lives in place of the harsh practices one imagines as ascetic. Judging from the men with whom I have spoken, I have come to agree with the Franciscan theologian,

Fr. Martin Pable (1975), who recast celibate asceticism into a positive statement about life that refuses to be encapsulated by popular presuppositions. Humanness unbounded by sexuality, love beyond loneliness, sexual identity grounded in real generativity, and transcendent awareness and activity are all open to the celibate and are the reward of his discipline (pp. 266–276).

Often, the men who are the best examples of celibate achievement have the hardest time describing “how” they do it. They may mention some practice of prayer, or even a hobby or interest that has sustained them, or the example of others, but somehow celibacy becomes for them a natural consequence of who they are, what they love, and what they are devoted to.

Interviewing these men led me to look for the supports they established internally and used externally that fostered their development and made celibacy possible for them. What distinguished their lives from those of priests who did not practice or achieve celibacy? Was it merely a difference in character, opportunity, or motivation? Certainly, each of these factors does play a part.

### ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CELIBATE ACHIEVEMENT

Originally, I identified four elements that were universally present in all the celibate achievers I had interviewed up to that point—the early 1970s: prayer, work, community, and service. Men of diverse circumstances, from librarian to missionary, scholar to urban activist, all demonstrated a well-defined system of prayer that was an integral part of their day and existence. Each man was productive and, even if pressured by particular situations, was happily working. Each had a clear idea of whom he considered to be his community and family; the Church as such did not always rate as paramount, but every man looked to a group of specific people to whom he felt devoted. Finally, each man’s life was one of meaningful service. Presuming generally good mental health and physical aptitude, I believe that it is within these four areas that the keys to understanding the successes and failures of celibate adjustment are to be found.

In order to expand my understanding of the system of celibacy within the Catholic priesthood, I began to examine early spiritual writers who mediated a celibate life-style for others. Surprisingly, little explicit reference to celibacy exists in the rules formulated by these writers. At first I was discouraged by the omission, only to realize later that the absence itself supported my own observations rather than dismissed them. I quite naturally turned first to the Rule of St. Benedict (1980 ed.), because it was the most familiar to me and because historically it occupied the premier

place in propagating the celibate way of life within the monasteries and among the secular clergy as well. It did so especially through Popes Gregory I (540–604) and Gregory VII (1020–1085).

The Benedictine, Gregory I, called the Great, enforced celibacy for all the clergy without exception and even deposed offending prelates. His *Liber Regulae Pastoralis* (*Pastoral Care*) written in 591 (1950 ed.) proposed the norms of pastoral care to be provided by the secular clergy. For a thousand years, this book was traditionally handed to each bishop upon his consecration. The norms presumed a celibate ministry.

Gregory VII, who was also trained under the Rule of Benedict, as part of the Cluniac reforms reestablished celibacy as a requirement for all clergy in the Western Church:

With the object of rooting out moral abuses in the Church and freeing it from lay control, he first reinforced, at his Lenten synods of 1074 and 1075, his predecessors’ decrees against clerical marriage and simony. This provoked great resistance, especially in France and Germany, but special legates armed with overriding powers were able to overcome most of it. (Kelly, 1986, p. 155)

After studying this rule, I identified 10 instead of four essential inter-related elements that support celibacy as a way of life (Sipe, 1983). Later, I could identify them as addressing three main areas of human need: the spiritual, the psychological, and the physical (Sipe, 1990). I hold that these elements are present in the lives and the codification of the experience of every celibate rule maker.

The most significant religious codifier in the past 500 years has been Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556). His profound spiritual experience is transmitted in his *Spiritual Exercises* (1978 ed.), which do not necessarily demand a celibate response but rather form a solid base for the transforming religious experience or orientation indispensable to celibacy. Further, it is from this base that he founded his Society, the Jesuits—a way of life that contains all the essential elements mentioned above.

To put the matter in a contemporary framework: These religious traditions endure and continue to draw men and become for some of them a structure within which they can successfully sublimate their sexual drives. This is because the structure demonstrates how one can supply sufficient biopsychosocial reinforcement to make human development possible and religious aims realistically attainable (see Figure 13:2). The ten elements that support celibate achievement are: work, prayer, community, service, attention to physical needs, balance, security, order, learning, and beauty.

### 1. Work

"What are you going to do when you grow up?" "What are you going to be?" are the kinds of questions that plague and inspire the young. Everyone has to do something; everyone has to be something. Everyone has to work. A man's celibacy is inextricably bound up with work, with the fact of work as mastery—the productive use of one's energies and time—rather than with a particular task.

The variety of work that can absorb the vitality of a celibate is amazing. Many celibates, however, are not satisfied with the priestly functions of sacramental minister, teacher, or plant administrator; their individual interests can range from the theoretical and ecclesiastical areas of their primary training to photography, fly-tying for fishing, or gardening. I include under this rubric of work some activities that others might number as hobbies because I have found that celibates seem to know the value of time and productivity and find these activities related to their work/mastery energies.

### 2. Prayer or Interiority

I have never interviewed a man who has attained celibacy without finding in him a rich and active prayer life. This is so intimately bound up with celibate practice and achievement that Dr. Bartemeier taught me always to inquire first about the prayer life of a priest when making a clinical assessment. A celibate's prayer life will reveal the capacity, quality, and nature of his relationships not just with transcendent reality but also with other significant human beings and his self-concept as well.

There will be complaints about the next observation I am about to make, but state it I must because I have found it to be consistent: I have not come across one man who has achieved celibacy who has not devoted at least one and a half to two hours daily to prayer. The danger in this comment is that it will be perceived in a mechanistic way or as some kind of litmus test of celibate practice; there are those who spend considerable time in prayer and yet are not celibate. There can also be periods of scant prayer even in the observant; nevertheless, a regular and meaningful prayer life was invariably a component mentioned by those who had achieved celibacy.

There does not seem to be any shortcut or substitute for time devoted to interiority during which one is in touch with a reality beyond self. Many of these men described how the time spent in prayer became a priority for them, increasingly so as they confronted challenges to their lives and ministries.

Model Structure for  
Celibate Achievement

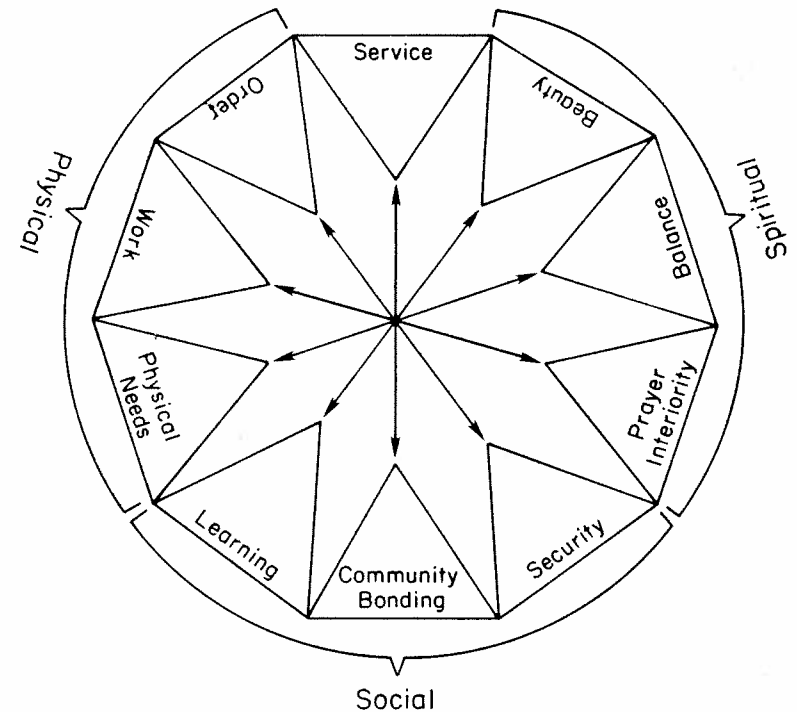


FIGURE 13:2. Model Structure for Celibate Achievement

### 3. Community

The importance of interiority leads quite naturally to the third element found among men who have achieved celibacy: a sense of themselves as part of a community. They seemed to know the answer to the Gospel question: "Who is my mother and brothers and sisters?" In some with a very highly developed religious personality, we found an awareness of the family of humanity, and in others an awareness of oneness of self with all creation.

This consciousness in this group was not theoretical or ephemeral. The men had a deep sense of persons: people to whom they were committed and people on whom they could rely. One man, despite being incapacitated by physical injury and disgruntled and gruff with those around him, clearly manifested the depth of his allegiances. In short, strong object relationships with a wide variety of persons seem to support celibate achievement.

#### 4. Service

All of these three elements—work, prayer, and community—are united in the awareness of service as a meaningful existence. In other words, all is “on account of the kingdom.” Whatever the work, the prayer form, or the community for the particular celibate, the effort is beyond the self.

Some mentioned that it was not always easy to be conscious of this reality. They pointed out that at times it was tempting to be the “served” and special one, receiving or directing the service of others. They were also aware that such a shift—so acceptable culturally—was a danger to maintaining that which was essential to their rightful calling.

#### 5. Physical Needs

Many adults think of sexual gratification as a primary physical need along with those of home, food, and clothing. They accordingly spend a good deal of their time and effort on taking care of these necessities. Many celibates are forced to spend more time than they would like on taking care of their physical needs even though they admit that they are generally well cared for. Some priests felt their living standard was reasonably commensurate with (or better than) that of the people they served.

We found a wide variety of adjustments in this area, not so much in the essentials as in the details left to taste and quality. Some priests savored exquisite food, whereas others seemed quite indifferent to its quality. Some also enjoyed an alcoholic drink, whereas others were abstinent. A few said they had had a problem with alcohol in the past, but no addictive alcoholic was represented in the group of celibate achievers. (I believe that active alcoholism is incompatible with the achievement of celibacy.)

Not all of the achievers were lean; several portly gentlemen confessed that they had struggled with a weight problem all of their adult lives. There were some who said that food and drink remained the areas of their greatest and most persistent combat. I was left with the impression that this was a group of men who knew themselves, knew their limits and needs, and fulfilled them appropriately and with gentleness. One man stated it clearly, “If I don’t assure myself enough legitimate pleasure, I’m liable to seek the illegitimate.”

Indeed, there were some men for whom the word “ascetic” seemed the first obvious description, but they lacked the force of reaction formation that one often sees in the fanatic or youthful enthusiast. There was a quiet discipline about their lives and I observed consistently an accompanying tolerance of others and their needs, along with an understanding of their different ways of meeting them.

I believe that for these priests the process of learning to assess their own limitations and needs and of finding appropriate ways to overcome and meet them not only bestowed self-satisfaction but also contributed to their appreciation of the human condition of the people they loved and served. Several times I had the pleasure of observing the openness and uncritical acceptance these celibates demonstrated for the behaviors of deprived persons and underprivileged parishioners. The priests seemed to understand poverty as a condition rather than focusing on acts of thievery, for example. They had empathy for the cold, unloving, and harsh environment that demoralizes people whom others labeled as immoral, irresponsible, or perverted.

Several times I recalled Victor Hugo’s bishop and his silver candlesticks in *Les Misérables*. I felt that a number of the men I interviewed really did look at the world’s unfortunates with the attitude “There but for the grace of God go I.”

#### 6. Balance

Another element I identified not only in the codes of the spiritual writers but also in the lives of the celibate achievers was balance. It is the psychological and spiritual quality that probably ensures the flexibility necessary to juggle the inner and outer daily and seasonal demands. Not only does balance moderate the physical instincts and their legitimate satisfaction, it also assures sufficient prayer and quiet to restore the consciousness of one’s goals and values, and limits the tendency to overwork.

I met a few of these men fortuitously as they were struggling with a considerable amount of inner anguish. In some instances, a man needed a neutral and supportive arena in which to sort out his inner confusion. In every instance, I could describe the experience they were undergoing as “a dark night of the soul.” The process outlined by St. John of the Cross is an apt comparison.

From these men, I learned to ask informants about their specific periods of special stress. All had undergone the periods I have described in the preceding chapter. Sometimes combined with one of those temporal stages of celibate development and sometimes independent of them, the periods were characterized as deep internal struggles, filled with confusion and disorganization.

Several of my psychiatric colleagues could understand these periods only in traditional psychiatric terms. However, several other colleagues, who had wide experience with religious, knew what I was talking about when I said that there was a “different” quality to the struggles of these men. I found Kazimierz Dabrowski’s (1964) concept of positive disintegration helpful in defining these periods. He outlined the process as follows.

The developmental instinct, therefore, by destroying the existing structure of personality, allows the possibility of reconstruction at a higher level.

In this procedure we find three phenomena which are to some extent compulsory:

1. The endeavor to break off the existing, more or less uniform structure which the individual sees as tiring, stereotyped, and repetitious, and which he begins to feel is restricting the possibility of his full growth and development.
2. The disruption of the existing structure of personality, a disintegration of the previous internal unity. This is a preparatory period for a new, perhaps as yet fairly strange and poorly grounded value.
3. Clear grounding of the new value, with an appropriate change in the structure of personality and a recovery of lost unity—that is, the unification of the personality on a new and different level than the previously held one (pp. 2–3).

This is not far removed from some of the thinking of St. Augustine and other spiritual writers. I have found that many celibates must expand the bounds of traditional thinking in order to integrate their celibate practice with the reality of their lives. Meister Eckhart (1981 ed.) is a spiritual writer whose work helped me comprehend the progress toward inner balance that informants described. An abstract thinker, Eckhart was interested in the sources of universal being and connection and in the relationship of an individual being in God and God in being. A celibate's sense of detachment and his understanding of sin as part of life and spiritual process are areas in which understanding aids the struggle to balance celibate values.

One informant related that his practice of celibacy was incomplete, split off, and uncommitted until he was 40 years old. At that time, he was hospitalized and nearly died. In his recuperative period, he experienced a self-evaluation the core of which was one whole night that he spent in his sickbed meditating on the Lord's Prayer. Not conscious of the passage of time that night, he has since maintained a sense of the meaning of every word and phrase in the prayer and he credits to that experience his enduring celibate practice and the balance he has kept in his life. He had not read the writings of St. Teresa of Avila prior to his illness; when he finally did study them, he was astonished that her description of the prayer of quiet echoed so accurately his own decisive spiritual encounter.

### 7. Security

Security is a universal human requisite for growth and for the development of adequate coping mechanisms. As I have said elsewhere, "the sense

of stability, enduring circumstances, rootedness in interpersonal relationships, with bonds to time, place, and practical realities, are fundamental to personal growth and development" (Sipe, 1983, p. 434).

In part, this is integral to the vow of celibacy. I have already quoted Gandhi's experience of celibacy before and after he took his vow. The prayer, work, community alliance, and service so essential to celibate practice are sealed by the internal commitment expressed in a vow. The commitment establishes the inner security and allegiance that manifest themselves especially in relatedness.

This element is closely allied with the community mentioned earlier, but it is also an expansion of it. The core community, like the nuclear family, is the base from which one reaches out and to which one can retreat. One's identity is confirmed by the essential relationships, but security in that identity allows one to expand.

The base for security is laid down in early childhood in attachment and separation—especially to and from the mother. The resolution of the process is strong object constancy and the solidification of identity and relationships. This resolution then forms a model for problem-solving and coping skills in the face of evolving challenges to one's security in new contexts.

There will be an ebb and flow of problems and confrontations in any life cycle, and the celibate is not immune from them. His commitment should provide him an overarching relatedness that sustains him through reversal and crisis. Many celibates have testified to this reality in their experience. Some felt that at some point they had been betrayed by those they believed they had had a right to count on, only to find a deeper sense of self in recovering from the betrayal.

Somewhere in the struggle, the celibate must discover a mutuality of durability, one that can span his life cycle. Although mediated by others, its core is internal, secure in the commitment to the transcendent. Many men spoke of their test of "faith." When analyzed, it was not a test in the traditional sense of doubt about the existence of a God, but rather in the value and meaning of the relationship upon which they had built.

Security is both the father and the child of intimacy. As the product of intimacy, security is based on the interaction of trust, self-disclosure, and shared pleasure. In speaking with priests, I am frequently struck by their references to loneliness. In many histories of those who have failed in the celibate practice are accounts of backfired attempts at legitimate intimacy. Overeager, misplaced trust and indiscriminate self-disclosure led to frustration or sexual acting out. Sometimes these attempts were followed by rejection within the celibate circle.

All celibate achievers had someone to whom they felt they had confided the essence of themselves, and most had been the recipients of such disclosure. Above all, they all maintained self-respect and the respect of others,



the great reinforcements to security. Security seemed also to allow tolerance of differences and the expansion of one's circle of trusted friends, both clerical and lay.

Security also means the discovery of places to be oneself within the circle of relationships involving mutual interdependence. This is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks for a celibate: how to be celibate when recreating and when not involved with official duties; how to be a celibate on an equal plane with those who are not.

Many informants recounted how associations that began with the promise of mutual respect for the other's commitment ended with sexual compromise. Nonetheless, many of the achieved celibates had forged alliances and friendships that did fulfill the promises.

Fr. Noel Mailloux, O.P., said to me that failure to find the right work assignment was most disruptive with respect to establishing adult, secure, human relationships for the celibate. As an example, Mailloux described the situation in which a young celibate is assigned to a parish or to pastoral work into which he enthusiastically throws all his energies. Often this assignment is abruptly terminated, and the young priest is transferred. In this new situation, the young man invests less of his energies into relationships, anticipating a second additional set of painful separations.

The danger is that with each new parish, the priest becomes increasingly isolated in his official persona and consequently is progressively more vulnerable to a sexual liaison. Celibate achievers, however, seemed to know what others did not: how to achieve relationships of broad mutual satisfaction and respect that enhanced their celibate identity without imposing on it clerical trappings.

I have emphasized this element of security because it seemed to be the confirmation of the integrity of these priests' celibate identities. These men functioned as celibates and felt they were consistently "themselves," regardless of circumstances or surroundings. They did not change into a different kind of private persona distinct from their public image and they did not split off their personal life from their stated values.

### 8. Order

I never met a celibate achiever who lacked a sense of order in his daily and seasonal life. I encountered a few whose system of order was so idiosyncratic that at first it appeared to be disorganization—or, in one case, chaos—but on further examination I discovered that this was not the case.

While balance means a spiritual quality regulating the inner competing needs, order responds to the regulation of time and energy, whether in prayer, work, study, hobbies, or recreation. If one cannot organize his time and energy, one is deprived of the satisfaction of mastery and

achievement—those very elements of productivity which make the sacrifice of sexual gratification possible.

Perhaps it is not surprising that celibates who have legislated for others arrange the days and the seasons of a celibate's life by way of systematizing an order of prayer. In houses of training, to some extent, and in some established religious communities, the official regimen of prayer sets aside specific times of day around which all other aspects of daily life, work, recreation, and meals fit.

The important lesson to be learned from this ordering is that the daily, seasonal, and annual cycles of prayer recitations measure out human life into manageable segments and make synchrony with vital rhythms possible. Celibacy that is insistently assailed by recurring human desire and buffeted by a hostile culture can only maintain itself a moment or a day or a season at a time. Order not only fosters productivity, but is a conscious regulation of one's time and energies, which obviates unnecessary challenges to their values and intentions.

Ordering of work, hobbies, interests, associations, and friendships, as well as of prayer, are all part of the challenge for the celibate. Here, again, rigidity is less successful than is flexibility. One who can reorganize his life to meet changing demands is better equipped to maintain internal order than one who is wedded to an established routine that must be abandoned entirely in the face of new circumstances.

Several informants told us that they learned their lesson on how to organize their lives only after the failure of a system on which they had previously relied too heavily, in most cases an external ordering. Some of these men reminded me of the accounts of successful prisoners of war—men who, in solitary confinement, learned to segment and regulate their days, devising ways, even under severe deprivation, of finding meaning and endurance by providing a makeshift structure to their lives.

### 9. Learning

Not all men who achieved celibacy were scholars, but the learned were overrepresented in this group. I can say that, by and large, this was a group of men who were interesting because they themselves were interested in many things and many people. A certain level of intellectual achievement was traditionally required for ministerial studies. Certainly, intelligence and successful celibate attainment are not correlative, but the love for learning and intellectual curiosity probably are. It is difficult to be a good celibate without continued learning. Many priests have told me that it is impossible. They rest their case on the need for both intelligent ministry and intellectual and spiritual growth—practical as well as theoretical.



One priest repeated the advice he had heard from a celibate whom he admired: "The only two things a priest needs are the Bible and the *New York Times*," the timeless and the timely, intelligently mediated for the people one loves and serves.

The denial of sexual pleasure by itself does not lead to intellectual achievement, but the dedication of one's life to the service of others, even to the extent of sexual self-denial, does.

### 10. Beauty

There is a need for legitimate pleasure that takes the form of beauty in many celibates' lives. This is absolutely clear when celibates band together in stable communities. Even those confounded by the practice of celibacy can admire its artistic productions. What I said about monastic history applies in some degree to all celibates:

A love for beauty seems to flow naturally from the conditions provided by monastic living. The order and balance in day-to-day living, reverence for learning, and attention to simple human needs, form a psychological synergism easily demonstrable in monastic history. They give rise to a number of expressions. For example, liturgical prayer led to its natural enhancement through psalmody and gesture. The practical necessity of providing permanent, stable housing allowed for architectural achievements. The task of copying manuscripts led to the art of embellishment and illumination. In short, it seems that the monastic spirit cannot be indulged without a natural sublimation into beautiful as well as practical forms. (Sipe, 1983, p. 343)

This is, of course, a derivative quality. However, learning and beauty are cultural achievements that inspire people to think about the transcendent and about values that are of immeasurable worth. Celibate achievers did tend to be rather more culturally literate than not. Some had a deep love for music, others for art or drama. Some could translate these appreciations into their ministries; others could only use them directly for their own sustenance.

When I shared this observation with the eminent theologian Godfrey Diekmann, he pointed out to me that the first visual portrayal of Christ was in the form of Apollo, the god of beauty.

This then is the celibate structure that is manifest in the lives of celibate achievers. They created it and, in turn, they are created by it. The structure, rather than producing one kind of person, yields a wide variety of individuals. The refined aesthetes of profound gentleness as well as the

rough-and-ready action-oriented are both represented. The quiet, unobtrusive and unassuming man as well as the much noticed leader has likewise achieved celibacy. Some of these men said that they have always felt that they had a same-sex orientation, although they lacked experience. Others spoke at length about their periods of sexual stress and temptations toward women during the course of their celibate striving.

I have encouraged several informants to write autobiographies of their sexual/celibate achievement. Some just laughed in response, but none has accepted the challenge. The refusals are a loss to those who would like to understand and support the celibate ideal. They are also a great deficit in the propagation of the ideal and the education of those who are inspired to follow the celibate path. Having such limited written witness to what lived celibacy is like and how it is achieved by ordinary men makes it not only unattractive but also unbelievable.

### WHO WILL FOLLOW?

The recurring question is: Who will follow the celibate path that is inextricably bound with religious life and, at least currently, with the Roman Catholic priesthood? Vocations to the priesthood have declined in recent decades; many reports have said that celibacy is a major stumbling block. I personally believe that the crisis is far deeper than that. At core, it is a spiritual dilemma of which sexuality and celibacy are important elements. Also at the vortex of the crisis are justice and the credibility of authority.

There have been official attempts to understand and renew the lagging spirit of the religious and priests in the United States. Pope John Paul II wrote to all of the U.S. bishops on April 3, 1983, setting up a commission to study religious in this country. On February 22, 1989, he wrote to all of them again, this time with a report of the commission's findings. The report was assembled after much listening to and dialoguing with men and women religious. It indicated that there is serious concern about the life of celibates, but great fear in addressing directly the questions that count. Pious generalities are reiterated without any original and careful analysis of the core conflicts presented. Authority and official teachings become the saving plank offered to a drowning person.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops produced a wise document, *The Program of Priestly Formation* (1982). The document deals with the foundation of the priest's college studies and with the major seminary years—the last four years of training prior to ordination or, more specifically, the professional part of training.

The document is sage and thoughtful in its treatment of celibacy. Unfortunately, its suggestions have not been successfully implemented in any

training center, as far as I know. There is, for example, no seminary in the United States, training priests, which has so much as a one-semester course on celibacy or on the necessary correlative material of human sexual development.

One problem with training young men for celibacy and to be moral leaders in the area of human sexuality is the enduring controversy between Augustinian thinking—which implies that all sexual pleasure is at least tinged with evil—and the view of sexuality as a part of good nature. Cassian, writing from 420–426, was a celibate who preserved the wisdom of the early celibates of the desert and concluded from them that sexuality was woven into the fibers of our beings:

When a thing exists in all persons without exception . . . we can only think that it must belong to the very substance of human nature, since the fall, as it were, “natural” to man . . . when a thing is found to be congenital . . . how can we fail to believe that it was implanted by the will of the Lord, not to injure us, but to help us. (Brown, 1988, p. 420)

“How do you do it?” is a fair question from any seminarian to his celibate professors or his bishop. It is an extremely difficult question to field, but unless more men who support celibacy as an important spiritual practice put their explicit example on the line, the practice will wither. St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, the first example of a real autobiography in Western literature, gave weight to his judgments about all sexuality precisely because of his personal and unstinting honesty.

Men will follow Christ if they can find persons who have already done so with honesty and joy. Nothing is more powerful than example. Nothing exerts more authority than simple truth lived.

The problem of the selection of priests is not new. St. Paul lays it out well:

A bishop must be irreproachable, married only once, of even temper, self-controlled, modest, and hospitable. He should be a good teacher. He must not be addicted to drink. He ought not to be contentious but, rather, gentle, a man of peace. Nor can he be someone who loves money. He must be a good manager of his own household, keeping his children under control without sacrificing his dignity; for if a man does not know how to manage his own house, how can he take care of the church of God? (1 Tim. 3:2–5)

He wrote similarly on another occasion:

As I instructed you, a presbyter must be irreproachable, married only once, the father of children who are believers and are known

not to be wild and insubordinate. The bishop as God’s steward must be blameless. He may not be self-willed or arrogant, a drunkard, a violent or greedy man. He should, on the contrary, be hospitable and a lover of goodness; steady, just, holy, and self-controlled. In his teaching he must hold fast to the authentic message, so that he will be able both to encourage men to follow sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it. (Titus 1:5–9)

Some advocates of a married clergy will quickly point out Paul’s presumption of such. This is beside the point here—namely, the high moral standards required of any clergy. There is no lack of statement of ideals. There is, however, reticence to put oneself on the line, so to speak, in ways that people can hear and to which they can relate.

The crucial problem is that the Church exacts high standards in theory without actually having enough effective means of supporting those who would subscribe to them. This is most certainly true of celibacy.

A study completed in the 1970s of the characteristics that people value most in their clergy revealed nine elements, listed here in the order of descending importance:

1. The willingness to serve without looking for acclaim.
2. Personal integrity.
3. Personal, lived religion; he should set a good example.
4. Competence and a sense of responsibility.
5. Community leadership.
6. Be an empathetic counselor.
7. Be a thinker (student).
8. Able to perform under pressure.
9. Acceptance of ongoing need for personal growth.

These are criteria that should be taken seriously by both celibate and married clergy. There is no proof that celibates can fulfill these requirements better than the married clergy, but it is also not clear that a married clergy has an advantage in doing so.

In 1982, a group in Nebraska under the leadership of Dr. Donald Clifton, an educational psychologist, developed a test instrument for future clergy, the Priest Perceiver Interview. Selection Research Incorporated, of which Clifton is the founder, has pledged itself, in the account of Sr. Jo Ann Miller, who was instrumental in developing the test for prospective priests, to “study intensely for 50 years the thought patterns of people who make a significant difference in the lives of other people” (Miller et al., 1984, p. 105).

The creators of the testing process defined and selected “successful” priests, interviewed them, and analyzed the thought content from the re-

corded interviews. Their interview structure merits credibility and correlates well with the popular perception of people who know the test candidates well. Nowhere, as far as I can tell, is there any direct assessment of sexual/celibate adjustment. This does not invalidate the test, but it is, of course, an important omission since many of the priests we interviewed would merit unflinching endorsement as successful priests and yet have maintained a full sexual life on the side.

The Priest Perceiver Interview lists 14 themes that are divided into three foci. The first focus involves the question "*Can* this person be a priest?" In order to qualify, the following five criteria must be met, according to Miller (1984, pp. 105–107):

1. Consciousness of the presence of God.
2. Positive human relationships.
3. Capacity to enable others' growth.
4. Empathy for the feelings of others.
5. Courage to face resistance.

The second focus has to do with motivation and addresses the question "*Will* he do it?" The five themes listed here are:

6. Mission or sense of purpose.
7. Hope and optimism for the future.
8. Loyalty to tradition.
9. Community builder.
10. Ego awareness or a solid sense of self.

The third focus is based on the assumption that the style of ministry will be dependent on personality type and poses the question "*How* will he do it?"

11. A candidate may exhibit a style that emphasizes focus-setting priorities, goals, and persisting to completion.
12. Another candidate is called the arranger, good at facilitation and management.
13. The "Omni" is the intellectual adventurer.
14. The candidate who is endowed with superior verbal ability is called the Conceptual.

The questions remain: How do these spiritual leaders, whether celibate or married, integrate their sexuality with their ministries? What is the sexual/celibate capacity of a candidate? I hope that this work will aid those who are ferreting out the future leaders and educating them to deal directly, honestly, and intelligently with the areas of their prospects' sexuality and celibacy.

## Chapter 14

# THE FUTURE OF CELIBACY: RITUAL AND REALITY

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*"I am a man" answered Father Brown gravely; "and therefore have all devils in my heart. Listen to me. . . ."*

—G. K. Chesterton  
The Hammer of God

*"Toute est grâce."*

—Georges Bernanos  
The Diary of a Country Priest

At this point, I trust that it is clear to the reader that my search for the meaning and prevalence of celibacy has conferred on me a sense of realism about human nature and its struggles and yet has enhanced my sense of admiration for the spiritual power and service manifest by those who undertake the process of celibacy and follow through to its full integration. I recall telling my analyst how impressed I was with the depth of self-awareness I observed in some of the men who had achieved celibacy. At the time, I credited them with a kind of "self-analysis," an achievement she viewed skeptically, with the comment, "Freud's achievement was unique!" But I persist in my conviction that celibacy practiced and achieved still has a great deal to contribute to the understanding of the human condition and the advancement of humankind.

For those who feel that the deficits and failures of celibate practice invalidate it entirely, I say with Freud, "No one like me who presumes to wrestle with the dark forces within can hope to come through the struggle unscathed" (Freud, 1905/1953a). In spite of its history of faults and betrayals, celibacy's achievements on behalf of the human race are substantial, and I predict they will continue. Certainly, what we witness in celibacy achieved is a sublimation at work in which the sexual drive re-