LOVE WITHOUT A NAME: CELIBATES AND FRIENDSHIP

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LOVE WITHOUT A NAME:

CELIBATES AND FRIENDSHIP

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ABSTRACT

LOVE WITHOUT A NAME: CELIBATES AND FRIENDSHIP

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This research paper seeks to examine/investigate the role of friendship among men and women who took the vow of consecrated chastity. Despite their close connection with God, priests and nuns are human. They crave for intimacy and more often fall in love. This becomes complicated and sometimes devastating. The dual challenge faced by these celibates is to grow in communion with God and develop good relationships with people. This thesis attempts to meet that challenge by showing that human friendship enhances our understanding of friendship with God. Celibate life is not a solitary enterprise, but is what happens to us in relationship to others in friendship. Through biblical and theological reflection and a close analysis of the vow of chastity, I wish to show that it is possible to live great friendships in celibacy without the relationship being transformed into a marital romance. Chaste celibacy is a renunciation of what is beautiful in a human person for the sake of the Kingdom. It is a commitment of love. By living their vows faithfully and cultivating friendships, celibates become true signs and witnesses to the love and Kingdom of God.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................................................................................. iv

INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................................. 1

I. THE CRISIS ................................................................................................................................... 6

  Statement of the Problem .............................................................................................................. 6
  Challenges to Chaste Celibate Relationships .............................................................................. 8
  Literature Review ....................................................................................................................... 13
  Celibacy as Overt Problem ......................................................................................................... 13
  Celibacy and Human Love as Compatible ................................................................................. 21
  Celibacy for the Sake of the Kingdom of God ......................................................................... 26
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 30

II. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CELIBACY AND CHASTITY ..................................... 32

  The Chastity of Christ ................................................................................................................ 37
  Chastity as a Charism ................................................................................................................. 40
  Religious Chastity as a Sign ....................................................................................................... 41
  Community Dimension of Religious Chastity ......................................................................... 44
  Missionary and Apostolic Dimension of Religious Chastity ................................................... 47
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 50

III. HUMAN FRIENDSHIP AS LOVE ......................................................................................... 53

  Friendship with God .................................................................................................................. 54
  Human Friendship .................................................................................................................... 58
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 64

CONCLUSION ................................................................................................................................. 77

BIBLIOGRAPHY .............................................................................................................................. 79
INTRODUCTION

This research paper addresses itself to a few basic questions in respect to relationships between men and women who have taken the vows of celibacy for religious reasons, “who are married to God so to speak”. Despite their close connection with God, priests and nuns are human. They crave intimacy and more often fall in love. This becomes complicated and sometimes devastating. There is a miracle called friendship that dwells in the heart. You do not know how it happens or when it gets started. But you know the special lift it always brings and you realize that friendship is one of God’s precious gift! Friends are a very rare jewel indeed. They lend an ear, they share a word of praise and they always want to open their hearts to us. Celibates are in a unique position; they are obliged to love everyone in a platonic way. But they are not allowed to love anyone, or be loved by anyone, in the physical sense. Some say that is not natural while others believe it is a gift from God.

Friendship is at the very core of the Christian message. It is a sharing of things divine. To those he called, Jesus said, “I call you friends, I told you everything the Father told me” (Jn. 15:15). Friendship is essential in good relationships. Sharing, intimacy and trust are ingredients of a true friendship. Friendship extends further than the sharing of common pursuits. Christians know that the ultimate end or goal of the human person is to enjoy friendship with God. Human love is only but a reflection of the Trinity. Human
friendship is the natural preparation for entering into friendship with the Trinity. Friendship with God leads to friendship with humans. I lead my friend to the Trinity. He leads me to God. We lead each other to the Trinity. Without God we cannot do it. In his address to the Austrian bishops John Paul II urged “Your duty as pastors is not projects and organizations, but to lead the people to a deep intimacy with the Trinity.” How can celibates lead people to intimacy with God if they are not intimate themselves?

The dual challenge facing those who live a celibate life is to grow in communion with God and to develop good relationships with people. It is impossible to love God if one is incapable of human friendship and love. Chastity is able to blossom when friendship is present. Friendship is a great good that leads to spiritual communion (CCC 2347). It is my conviction that friendship is not detrimental but central to celibate living, that celibate persons are also sexual, and celibate life is a profound and a rewarding way of living. Friendship is the one relationship that endures throughout our lives and the power with which it enriches the lives of men and women in religious life cannot be neglected or ignored. I hope to convince my readers that celibate friendship understands love and is one of the values that can make a celibate’s life infinitely more beautiful and fruitful. I intend to show how human friendship enhances our understanding of friendship with God. Celibate life is not a solitary enterprise, but is what happens to us in relationship to others, especially the friendship relationships most crucial to our lives. Male and female celibates do ministry together. Any good friendships among them, becomes a living sign and witness to the love and Kingdom of God.

This study will contribute to the contemporary realization that chastity or celibacy freely chosen and lived for evangelical reasons is not merely a denial and renunciation of
marriage and sexuality, but a commitment of love. The focus on the irreplaceable role in affective growth of friendship among the religious men and women should lead to a serious revision of both theology and the practice of religious celibacy. Between celibates of different sexes almost anything can happen, from love-seeking disguised under pretence of spiritual help or communion in the love of God to habitual faults that are totally contrary to chastity. This affects the celibates’ lifestyle. The dilemma is that no one can live without love; yet it is almost impossible to love without awakening the sexual instincts. This poses a challenge and a great task to today’s theologian: a re-thinking of the understanding of friendship in relation to the vow of chastity.

This thesis attempts to meet that challenge by showing that it is possible to live great friendships in celibacy. The history of the church has given us outstanding examples, some well known in the public eye like, Francis of Assisi and Clare, Francis de Sales and Jean de Chantel who were really intimate and made it into sainthood. The purpose of this thesis therefore, is to examine/investigate the role of friendship among men and women who took the vow of consecrated chastity. In this work, I intend and hope to obtain answers to the following central questions: Is intimate friendship between men and women religious possible without their relationship being transformed into a marital romance? What is the place of intimacy and friendship among celibates in the understanding of the vow of chastity?

Let me hasten to say that there are many issues pertaining celibacy which are not my concern in this work and also many issues I cannot treat with the thoroughness expected, given the task before me. I am definitely not raising the debate about whether celibacy is optional or mandatory in the Roman Catholic Church. Neither am I addressing the issue
of homosexuality and or the problem of sex abuse scandals whose headlines have been and are still awash with the sad and unfortunate reports of Roman Catholic priests who have or are allegedly abusing children and young people whom they were ordained to serve. These are a huge shame, one that many who oppose the Church are using to claim that the Church is deceitful and that they ‘were right all along’. Scandals, betrayals and sins against chastity and celibacy should not be cause for lack of faith. I would like to proffer what our rejoinder as faithful celibates (Catholic priests and nuns) should be in this unfortunate situation. I propose that intimate friendship is possible between men and women religious provided it is properly handled and God is always involved through prayer and sacrifice. So it is not an impossibility to love a man or woman when our heart is given to God. In fact these friendships can develop into a marvelous love of God.

My methodology includes a biblical and theological reflection on love and friendship as shown in the Scriptures and among the Persons of the Trinity. Following the footsteps of myriad Christian writers who understood friendship principally as communion with God, I am going to discuss friendship within the traditional understanding of the vow of chastity. Through a close analysis of this vow, I wish to show that, chaste celibacy is a renunciation of what is beautiful in a human person for the sake of the Kingdom. I hope to achieve this in three chapters. The first chapter is divided into two parts; the Statement of the Problem outlines some challenges encountered by celibates in trying to cultivate friendship while they remain faithful to their vow of chastity and the Literature Review discusses how different scholars perceive celibate friendship. The second chapter discusses the Theological Foundations of Celibacy and Chastity making the point that consecrated/vowed chastity is a commitment to love. It is a call, a gift, a charism, and a
task initiated by God the Father to follow His Son Jesus Christ, who is chaste, through the
power of the Holy Spirit. The third chapter discusses Human Friendship as Love showing
the essence of the vow which lies in one’s loving relationship, friendship, and intimacy
with the self, others and with God.
I. THE CRISIS

Statement of the Problem

“If loving you is wrong, then I do not want to be right!” Yes, I meant exactly what I stated in the letter, although I felt a little nervous and thought of our Novitiate days when the letters (both outgoing and incoming) would be opened and read by the Novice Mistress before she mailed them or gave them to us. Would she approve of such words from me to a male friend? I mailed the letter anyway and I did not have a qualm of conscience. Martin and I have known each other for years, we are close friends. He is a Diocesan priest and I belong to a Religious Order, which means both of us have undertaken the vow of chastity and therefore lead a celibate life.

Ironically it was at a priestly ordination when we met. He was a Seminarian and I was a Candidate.¹ We fell in love at first sight, though I must admit this kind of love was very different from the one I felt for the two guys I had dated before I entered the convent, neither was it similar to what I felt for my two brothers. I was young and therefore confused about how I felt and yet I knew that I was not making a mistake by saying yes to God’s call. Because of distance, most of our communication was by mail, but the feelings became deeper as we grew up physically, spiritually and into our relationship.

¹ Candidate is the second stage in our Religious formation after Aspirant, the third being Postulant, followed by Novice, First Profession then Final also known as Perpetual. Most Orders especially in the US start as Postulants because they enter at a mature age.
Since it takes longer to study for priesthood than religious life, I took my vows 5 years before Martin was ordained, although age-wise, he is older. Now, after years of being Philosophy Professor, Director of Spiritual Formation and Rector of a Seminary, Martin is Bishop of a Diocese.

Our relationship is an obvious case, we are both confident that we are not leading double lives, but the question is; can one utter such words of strong affection and remain virtuous? Can these words be put in writing or worse still be verbalized by a man or woman who claims to live the virtue of celibacy? In other words can that ever be said by one who has taken the vow of celibacy? And the answer to this varies depending on which view one takes; for some that would be highly scandalous and therefore should not be uttered at all. Nuns and Priests are people of God and should not disclose such kinds of emotion and feeling. These men and women who claim to be holy virgins and spouses of Christ are nothing else but dishonest and they cheat, at best day-time friends and at worst, night-time lovers, all they have brought upon holy Church is scandal, betrayal and embarrassment, so who cares? What’s new?

This brings in the issue of trust; not only among the laity, but even those living the celibacy life begin to ask; is chaste celibacy lived with integrity possible? It would be very interesting to know what other celibates say about such relationships or special friendships among themselves. It is my conviction that the most helpful explanations of religiously motivated celibacy are those which deal with it in terms of personal experience.

This chapter seeks to examine some problems and challenges encountered by both male and female celibates in trying to cultivate the virtue of friendship among themselves.
while remaining true to their vow of chastity. In examining the faithfulness and commitment of celibate friendship, I show that although there are accidents and problems, intimate friendship between men and women religious is possible without the relationship being transformed into a marital romance. The question is; how does a celibate become intimate and remain pure in thought and action? I will explicate fomenting moral issues challenging celibate friendships in a sexualized culture of our contemporary permissive society and its implications on those who said yes to the gospel mandate; “Let anyone accept this who can” (Matt. 19: 12).

**Challenges to Chaste Celibate Relationships**

In an effort to establish and maintain friendships among themselves, celibates do encounter some challenges from both within and without. Some cite the demand for chaste celibacy as playing a major role in our current vocation crisis or as a contributing factor to incidents of sexual misconduct by clergy and religious personnel. Some still put the problem on today’s cry for intimacy as a great challenge to chaste celibacy. An explicit vow of chaste celibacy raises conscious awareness of the issue of sexuality. Another challenge to chaste celibacy is the confused understanding of the vow and the unsatisfactory explanation or rather the lack of a natural explanation of chaste celibacy to the young generation.

The recent and tragic reports of child abuse and other scandals involving priests and religious personnel have led more than a few people to question whether a life of chaste celibacy leads to emotional and psychological growth. To deny scandals, betrayal and embarrassment from and among celibates would be evading the truth, especially with an explosion in the media headlines involving ministerial priests ordained in the Roman
Catholic Church involved in sexual misconduct, particularly with minors, many people wonder if celibacy is possible and a healthy pursuit. However linking celibacy with pedophilia is unfounded. This stance is also supported by a report from the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, who told reporters in Chile recently that no serious study has ever shown a connection between celibacy and pedophilia, but many psychologists and psychiatrists believe there is a connection between homosexuality and pedophilia.\(^2\) Nothing reminds us more about the divine and human reality of the church than the crisis emerging from child abuse and the manner in which erring celibates were disciplined or not by the church leadership. The responses range from abandonment of faith to the denial that we have a problem.

When it comes to friendship, there are degrees: those ordinary friendships which one meets with everywhere among celibates vowed to the Lord, or between celibates and married people scarcely pose any problems for chastity. The problem for celibates arises when a deeper feeling manifests itself which begins to create a bond of affection. From then a friendship is truly affection for the person loved. This affection calls for a mutual knowledge that is more and more deep and gives birth to the desire for the other person’s presence. Such a friendship may be entirely free of what is sensual, but it may also demand manifestations of affection, which make it less free. It is here that chastity must intervene.

An obvious challenge to celibates in the experience of love between woman and man is accepting the limitations which celibacy places on that love. Often people find it difficult to meet the demands which celibate love makes upon them. There are of course

\(^2\) The Catholic Telegraph April 23, 2010
restrictions which celibacy imposes on the physical expression of love. Discipline is called for and discipline is painful; to restrain one’s desire for a physical expression of love incompatible with the loved one’s celibacy shows respect for the integrity of his or her chosen way of life.\(^3\) Though a religious in love may be sincerely moved toward genital love, genital behavior will violate the relationship because of lack of commitment, time, and place that are necessary for spontaneous and healthy genality. Genital behavior is unchaste because it militates against a celibate’s psychological and spiritual growth. Much of human life issues from sexual instinct and the need for affection; all of life is conditioned to some degree by these factors. How to envision and manage these very intimate, deep, and pervasive feelings is what prospective and actual celibates are eager to learn. How celibates understand and handle these feelings is what baffles non-celibates. The most helpful way to answer these questions or rather to enable people to answer them for themselves is by the testimony of celibates to their own experiences of celibacy.

Another challenge is that, culture, religion, and sexuality all play their roles in the contemporary crisis affecting traditional celibate and conjugal life styles. The crisis involves a critique of our culture, a critique of religion, and a more humanistic understanding of sexuality.\(^4\) When it comes to these, I am inevitably influenced by my cultural background (Shona culture of Zimbabwe) and that of the Roman Catholic Church, so I will share perspectives on American culture as well as these.


Most people do not connect celibacy and sexuality due to lack of understanding. It is not uncommon to find people who consider those vowed to celibacy as spiritual beings versus their brothers and sisters who opted for marriage and or singleness who are known as people of the flesh. I find this conspicuous especially among the Shona people of Zimbabwe where a priest is addressed as “Baba veZvoMweya” literally translated ‘Father of the Spirit,’ as opposed to a married man who is known as “Baba veZveNyama” also translated ‘Father of the Flesh!’ This distinction kind of put blinkers and narrows the perception of how the religious people are viewed. Celibates are still human, sexual beings who need to connect with others, this connectedness which they crave can be experienced in personal intimacy; they form relationships, are glad to be friends and frightened of feeling lonely.

Most religious orders today are in a crisis caused in part by the adoption of a secularist mentality and the abandonment of traditional practices. According to Cardinal Franc Rode, the crisis experienced by certain religious communities especially in Western Europe and North America, which reflects the more profound crisis of European and American society has dried up the sources that for centuries have nourished consecrated and missionary life in the church.5“The secularized culture has penetrated into the minds and hearts of some consecrated persons and some communities, where it is seen as an opening to modernity and a way of approaching the contemporary world.”6 It is more difficult today for religious Orders to find young people who are willing to break away from the superficial contemporary culture and show a capacity for commitment and

5 The Catholic Telegraph: 02/12/2010, 179th Year No. 6 p. 10.

6 Ibid.
sacrifice. Unless this is addressed in formation programs, religious orders will produce members who lack dedication and are likely to drift away. It is easy, in time of crisis to turn to deceptive and damaging shortcuts, or attempt to lower the criteria and parameters for admission to consecrated life and the course of initial and permanent formation. This in turn compromises the quality of life led by the religious people. That the quality of life in some religious communities leaves a lot to be desired is also evidenced by the Vatican-ordered Apostolic Visitation of institutes for women religious in the United States which those members who lead dubious life styles have chosen to call “apostolic investigation”.

The challenge of the present moment however, I suggest should not be viewed in strictly negative terms, this can be used as an opportunity by Religious Orders to better define themselves as “alternatives to the dominant culture, which is a culture of death, of violence and of abuse,” and make it clear that their mission is to joyfully witness life and hope, in the example of Christ.

An additional difficulty with celibate life relates to maturity. Younger celibates are more edgy. Still contending mightily with what one friend calls “the raging orchestra of my hormones,” they are more obviously struggling to contain their desires for intimacy, for physical touch, within the bonds of celibacy. Often they find their loneliness intensified by the incomprehension of others. In a culture that denies the value of their striving, they are made to feel like fools, or worse. The sexual formation that many receive is from billboards, magazines, internet, television, movies, you name it. Orgasm becomes just another goal; people undress for success. It’s no wonder that in all this powerful noise, the quiet tones of celibacy are lost to the extent that we have such trouble comprehending what it could mean to dedicate one’s sexual drives in such a way that
genital activity and procreation are precluded. But experienced celibates have taught me that celibacy, practiced rightly, does indeed have something valuable to say to the rest of the world. Specifically, they have taught me to appreciate the nature of friendship. This is not irony as much as grace: in learning to be faithful to her vow of celibacy, the celibate develops the talent for relationships. Following the demands of the Order’s Constitution on hospitality that requires all visitors to be received as Christ, has transformed some young celibates into mature women who can mingle with anybody.

**Literature Review**

When considering the range of literature that has been developed on celibacy and friendship, I find that there are three general ways people understand it. The first group questions the genuineness and integrity of male and female friendship among celibates and therefore sees celibacy as a problem, the second group views celibacy and human love as compatible and I propose that celibate friendship should be lived as a sign and witness to the love of the Trinity. These important general ways of understanding celibate friendship are going to be discussed under the following subheadings; Celibacy as Overt Problem, Celibacy and Human Love as Compatible, and Celibacy for the Sake of the Kingdom.

**Celibacy as Overt Problem**

It is a tough time to be a priest or nun today as shown by the challenges discussed above. As the Roman Catholic Church is struggling to cope with reports of pedophilia, bogged down with debates on homosexuality and issues of whether or not celibacy
should be mandatory for the ordained ministry, there is another aspect of priestly sexuality that has been known but seldom discussed: relationships between priests and adult women. Running parallel to these sex abuse scandals, are stories of priests breaking the celibacy vow by having affairs with married women, impregnating girls and some nuns in the process. More often than not, when priests break their vows of celibacy it’s with adult women. Experts estimate that at least half of heterosexual priests have had some sort of sexual relationship with an adult woman.7 I do not have the statistics, but I can certainly confirm that some of these women are nuns. It is not uncommon for the vowed religious, both men and women to violate their celibacy with each other in big shameful ways.

There are many incidents in which a man and a woman vowed to religious chastity have thought their friendship was pure until they fell into each other’s arms. Some of the celibate friendships which result in romantic relationships lead to illicit love affairs and some end up in sinful activities like abortion. While in the US and a few other countries abortion is not a crime, in most countries like Zimbabwe, it is not only a sin, but a criminal offence which warrants imprisonment. Unfortunately it is such loves which dare not admit their true names and eventually end in disasters which speak most loudly to the world. We need only look at newspaper accounts of sex abuse by celibates to see evidence of celibacy that isn’t working. One could well assume that this is celibacy, impure and simple. And this is unfortunate because there are myriads of those who are faithful in living their celibacy and in fact, celibacy practiced rightly has the potential to address the sexual idolatry of our culture in a most helpful way.

Some scholars attribute the problem to the fact that celibates are male and female; and men and women cannot be friends without being sexual. C. S. Lewis observed that “in most societies at most periods, friendship will be between men and men or women and women. Men and women would seldom have had with each other the companionship in common activities which is the matrix of friendship.”\(^8\) But in modern society the issue has become moot. Men and women do share in common activities. Male and female celibates do ministry together. Echoing Lewis, however, many moralists and psychologists think there can be friendship only between members of the same sex and suspect that friendships between men and women are more or less a disguise of erotic love.

It is perhaps because of these human failings among celibates that a renowned theologian like Donald Cozzens suggests “freeing celibacy.”\(^9\) He argues that the charism of celibacy as a gift of the Spirit should be distinguished and released from the canonical mandate of celibacy as a condition for ordination to the priesthood.\(^10\) Cozzens empathizes with the priests who strive by the grace of God to live the celibate life without being blessed with the charism of celibacy. He concludes, “the time has come to set celibacy free,” meaning that celibacy should not be mandatory for ordained priests. What he forgets however is the fact that celibacy as a meaningful life style, is an act of radical doubt about some values in the culture that easily become idolatrous, and also an act of

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\(^{9}\) Donald Cozzens, *Freeing Celibacy*, (Collegeville, Minnesota, Liturgical Press, 2006), 93.

\(^{10}\) Ibid.
affirmation about some human and Gospel values that easily get submerged in the culture.

I would suggest instead that the low-key hostility and resentment that celibates often display is related to the wider context of the crisis in Church ministry and this calls for an asceticism or spirituality not only for celibacy but of religious life itself. What unites all these threads is not “freeing celibacy,” as Cozzens suggests, but the paschal mystery. It seems, celibacy, mortification, purity of heart, service, contemplative vision – are all forms of dying to self and rising to new life in Christ, so that as a celibate I can be more life-giving, more generative, more loving toward the people I serve. Celibacy’s charism I claim is this total radical self-giving love through life-long abstinence from sexual relations. Even Cozzens also makes the point that committed celibates need relationships of intimacy as much as other human beings, but these will honor the commitment to celibacy and not to transgress it. As already noted above, the Church celebrates other relationships like this. Such relationships not only honored the commitment of those involved, but promoted it. These graced relationships remind us that there is rich, human fulfillment possible without marriage. The presumption holds, however, that these notable friendships were shared by charismatic celibates, men and women who experienced celibacy as their truth.”


too often, this kind of relationship is seen as extraordinary rather than a way of life for celibates.

The great saints and mystics are not the only ones to have succeeded in such friendships. Even in our own age which is so fascinated by eroticism, I know many men and women who are neither saints nor heroes but find the greatest and purest joys of their lives in their mutual friendship. The healthy celibate can be not only productive, but also holy. Crucial to my own work is the assertion that, without question, the witness of celibate friendship is counter-cultural to the indulgence and radical individualism typical of Western society. We rightly celebrate the example of deep, intimate, chaste friendships marking the spiritual heritage between Jordan and Diana, and John Henry Newman and his close friend, Ambrose St. John, with whom Newman is buried. These brothers and sisters are even encouraged to develop friendships among each other as a living sign and witness to the transcendence of the kingdom of God.

Celibates with deep friendships are in a position to test Lutheran theologian Gilbert Meilaender’s hunch that, “friendship between the sexes may take us not out of ourselves, but beyond ourselves and make us more whole, balanced and sane than we could otherwise be.”13 The development of human relationships is fundamental because without them the celibate will experience human unhappiness. This unhappiness will inhibit the witness to the joy found in communion with God and the celibate will not be an effective minister of God’s message of love. Perhaps it is time to take seriously such questions as: What is the nature of male-female friendship? Does it differ in significant

ways from same-gender friendship? How do male-female friendships differ from romances and marital loves? The need to explore these questions is urgent given the present realities, many men and women will naturally develop affectionate relationships outside of marriage celibacy allows space for us to ask these questions These new possibilities for inter-gender friendship present opportunities; they also present risks. Unless those risks are squarely faced, “the sex part’ of the interactions between men and women is likely to cause more pain and muddle than balance or sanity.

The pain is caused by the fact that some men and women pledged to religious celibacy fall in love with one another. They have in the past; they do today, and very likely will do so in the future. In his article, “The Commitment to Celibacy,” Fr Kevin Doran points out that; “people say it is sad to think of a celibate person who falls in love and cannot be married. I think it is even more sad to think of a celibate person who has never fallen in love.” To be in love means to be called into oneness with somebody. Love sometimes begins with infatuation; in fact infatuation has been described as love’s novitiate. But a relationship which remains rooted in infatuation is more an expression of my own felt needs than an expression of love for the other person as a person. The challenge of all true love, celibate love included, is to move beyond the stage of infatuation into a loving intimacy with people which is respectful of both their commitments and of my own. To love someone truly as a celibate demands, not that we repress our love, but that we deepen our capacity for expressing our love in other ways.

To respond appropriately to our feelings and to control our desires does not mean to deny them. Purity based on sexual denial is a fraud. Celibate men and women fall in love with each other. They may develop a deep love, unwittingly as a result of long
association in work or they may discover a strong bond of love as a not clearly foreseen result of cultivating an initial attraction whose nature they did not fully apprehend in the beginning. It might happen like Ignace Lepp suggests that; “From appearances it would seem that they were mistaken about the real nature of their feelings for one another.”

Lepp himself who was both a writer and a psychologist acknowledges the important role friendship plays between males and females. He affirms that despite the dangers, non-sexual friendship between men and women is not an impossible idea. He hastens to say that this can only be realized between persons who have attained a relatively high degree of spirituality, persons whose higher values are very much in evidence. Together with Lepp, I will also show that “man’s nature is less in his animal past than in the increasingly spiritualized future toward which he tends’.

Whatever way the relationship begins, when it is recognized, religious celibates are faced with the big question of what to do about their love. Christopher Kiesling who has served as a Dominican priest, theological professor and renowned author observed that,

Some will advise that the kind of love between man and woman which usually leads to marriage is simply incompatible with religious celibacy. One should be alert to resist even the first strings of such love. Once its existence is recognized, it should be rejected and the relationship generating and sustaining it cleanly broken. Others will say that if the love is genuine, it is a sign that the couples are not meant to be

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15 Ibid. 82.
celibate. Their celibate commitments should be set aside in favor of marriage; the latter is clearly their vocation.  

Both suggestions either, to stop the relationship or to get married, are unsatisfactory. Even if the first suggestion were theoretically correct, it is not practical. It is a message which those experiencing the exhilaration of human love are not disposed to hear, much less accept. Paradoxically, that option is tantamount to recommending that they give up their dedication to celebrate life. The value of human love at this point appears obvious and immediately satisfying, while the value of celibacy can be perceived only in the obscurity of faith and grasped in an unknown future. If a choice has to be made, it will very probably be for marriage. Rather than advice simply to “stop it”, guidance is needed about what to do with all the feelings and how to express them, so that a point of tranquility and clear sightedness can be reached. Then a decision can be made where celibacy will have a chance of winning out.

According to Kiesling, each of the options, either cutting the relationship or jumping into marriage, in a different way is unappreciative of human love’s potentialities on the one hand and, on the other, religious celibacy’s. The first option does not perceive the power of human love to intensify celibate dedication; two people can love one another into religious dedication, including celibacy. This conceives of celibacy more in terms of a manner of loving humanly. The second option underestimates the power of human love to flourish with a modicum of physical presence and expression. It fails to see the power of celibate dedication to confirm and enrich human love. In both options the expectations

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of human love between man and woman are tainted by “the standards of a sensate, sex-
saturated culture rather than derived from ideals of personal dignity and genuine love.”¹⁷

Both options presume that if a man and a woman love one another, they must go to bed
together, in marriage or outside it. Yet millions of men and women go to bed together
without any love for one another. And they are not celibate.

In conclusion to this part, I can say on the objective level, it takes a lot of time and
effort to cultivate a virtuous friendship. Relationships centered on total self-giving love
and on a profound sense of responsibility for the other as a gift don’t just happen
spontaneously. When a priest encounters a nun as a coworker, they do not automatically
fall into authentic, self-giving, committed love for each other. That is why we need a
virtue that helps us integrate our initial sensual and sentimental attractions with authentic
love for the other as a person. Chastity is the virtue that enables us to love this way.

**Celibacy and Human Love as Compatible**

Some scholars have argued that, celibate dedication and human love are not
necessarily incompatible and can be mutually enriching if harmonized; but since they are
difficult to reconcile in practice, the experience of human love, is therefore, a problem for
religious celibates. This sounds balanced as it respects the nature, values, and
potentialities of both religious celibacy and human love, but acknowledges that the
coincidence of the two is not easily handled. Each has its own tendencies and demands
which conflict with the other’s at certain points. Harmonizing these divergent tendencies,

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 155
balancing these conflicting demands and trying to resolve the resultant tensions constitute a formidable challenge.

For example, Kiesling denies that human love is a problem and proposes that human love should be regarded as a gift and a mystery. He agrees that its occurrence may create problems, but it is not itself a problem, but an awesome gift. This kind of love should be regarded as a gift and a mystery and not simply as a problem, and certainly not simply repudiated as an evil. To acknowledge, enjoy, and draw refreshment from the affection for and from others encountered in ministry is simply to accept a gift of God, his love in human form. Celibacy is a way of being human. Hence, it provides a place for many kinds of love. If the celibate is denying or suppressing those various kinds of affection for people in her life, she is very likely smothering affection in prayer, making it more trying and less satisfying.

Love is a delight in the presence of the other person and an affirming of his/her value and development as much as one’s own. Love between man and woman is a mystery to be admired, revered, explored and treasured, not a problem to be analyzed, attacked, solved and set aside. The power of love to transform personality, vision and life, is awesome. The wonder of this celibate love and the beauty of this mystery can nourish prayer, intensify love of God and neighbor, and inspire more intelligent and firm celibate commitment.  

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Keith Clark points out that, “Many people often make the mistake of choosing between sexual life and spiritual life. Whether married or celibate, it is possible to be both sexual and spiritual.”\textsuperscript{20} He who has also travelled the path of celibate commitment within religious life, understands that being sexual is obvious but mysterious. Clark expresses it very well; “Being sexual and celibate is all about the connection between sexuality and celibacy.”\textsuperscript{21} It is also about intimacy and loneliness, relationships, love-human and divine- and about prayer. Clark shares his personal experience of celibacy and relationships and urges his readers to seriously examine their own experience of being sexual and not to fear its mystery, and to recognize the necessity for intimacy in everyone’s life. Again Clark claims, “Part of the reason celibacy seems so irrelevant to many people is that often there is insufficient recognition of the relationship between the committed celibate life and the whole human experience of intimacy and relationships. As a result the connection between celibacy and sexuality is almost completely ignored.”\textsuperscript{22} People just assume that some people are sexual and others are celibate.

Huddleston claims that there can be joy in celibacy. She asks a very crucial question; how therapeutic is genital intimacy if say, married partners, for all their genital sharing, are unfulfilled? Most marriages break up before they begin and yet there is a lot of genital sharing. She makes a point that genital encounters will not alleviate interpersonal

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[20]{Keith, Clack. \textit{Being Sexual... and Celibate}. (Notre Dame, Indiana; Ave Maria Press, 1986) p. 103.}
\footnotetext[21]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[22]{Ibid. 104.}
\end{footnotes}
tensions of clerics and religious, instead might even compound the tensions. I propose that sexuality and celibacy are inseparable, but physical sex is separable. Choosing celibacy is to challenge the cultural idols of hedonism and consumerism. Celibacy is an authentic way of loving, that loving which always promotes the autonomy of the other person.

Adding to both Clark and Huddleston, I would suggest that the most important thing in life is that we become loving persons, deepen our capacity to love and be loved. The witness celibates can offer the world as loving, and giving persons is much more humanizing than the frantic search for intimacy and recognition. Celibates should be free to experience the tender love of the Lord and to mediate it to others. The attractive personality of Jesus is the concrete witness that one can be both truly human and celibate. Relationships of friendship can enhance one’s identity as person, increase one’s compassion, give one a renewed sense of being and strength, and enrich the Catholic Community, helping it to be generative toward the wholeness that family, community, Church, and culture can be.

The contemporary realization of the importance of sexuality in human life and of irreplaceable role in affective growth of friendship with members of one’s own and the other sex has led to a serious revision of both the theology and the practice of religious celibacy. The focus of attention, both theologically and in practice, is still largely on

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24 Ibid. 14.

25 Ibid. 42.
personal development, the improvement of the affective quality of community life, and consequent growth of celibates in interpersonal effectiveness. Increasingly, however, celibates are realizing the corporate significance of their chosen lifestyle as a witness complementary to that of Christian marriage, they are tending to see their celibacy less as a renunciation of marriage and more as a commitment to growth in love dedicated to the development of a world characterized by unselfish service and mutual care. \(^{26}\) I think of the vow of celibacy as one of the elegant healing choices that we religious make in response to the prophetic summons of our time. This elegant choice should be a lived attitude, a habit of the heart that acknowledges a desire to go deeper into God and our lives to discover how we can be partners in the healing of our hurting world.

We vowed religious need to redefine sexual energies in their non-perverted, most radical dimension as an empowering drive or passion toward right, mutual relationships that are loving, just and co-creative. To choose celibacy is to recognize and make real the incredible power of sexuality as the yearning, the hunger, the drive, saying yes to the breaking down of the walls that separate person from person, creature from creator; and to the making of reciprocal connections between and among us in which we find our common good – the common – wealth of God. According to Carter Heyward, “Setting our heart on God’s kingdom” is more an invitation to disengage ourselves sufficiently from our producing, controlling, result-seeking selves to create a “Sabbath heart”- a whole, spacious, full, and open heart that reaches out to engage and participate in co-creative actions. To be sure this means stepping out of our individual and collective egos and the internal structures that keep us fearful, squeezed and tight in order to make room

for God to lead us deeper into God’s passion for life, humanity and all creation in a new and different way.  

She claims that the person who allows God’s passion to fire her own passion, is, the one who not only remains human but who takes pleasure in being human…”

When we touch God’s passion, God pulls us beyond the boundaries of our own skin into the realization that we are in a common world, and that our strength and power lie in bonding together to live lives of friendship and hope as resistance to what ails our world. We are thrust into solidarity with one whole creation, “groaning in labor pains while we wait for the redemption of our bodies.”

Affirming the view that celibacy and human love are compatible, my thesis goes beyond to claim that well-developed celibate life is not only a life of intimate solitary presence to God, but also a cordial, gentle, human love life, outgoing and tender. Celibacy therefore witnesses for a specific attitude of love for both God and humanity.

**Celibacy For the Sake of the Kingdom of God**

According to Matthew, Jesus Christ assumed the condition of a celibate chastity for ‘the sake of the Kingdom of God’ (Mat. 19:12). He was a eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom of God. His being a eunuch is considered as an alternative lifestyle, which has a deep prophetic significance: It was a symbol of the relationship of His person with the Kingdom but was at the time a privileged instrument for making the Kingdom present. The celibacy of Jesus is defined by all the dimensions that constitute the coming of the Kingdom. It is celibacy that reveals a new style of filial and mystical relationship with

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28 Ibid. p. 47
God, of fraternal, communitarian and diaconal relationship with human beings and of lordly relationship with things. Thus, the celibacy of Jesus is a symbol and a parable of the Kingdom.”

Speaking about the vow of chastity we refer to consecrated chastity or religious chastity embraced by some for the sake of the Kingdom of God. This is the chastity of celibates or virgins. “The chastity of celibates, as a manifestation of dedication to God with an undivided heart (I Cor. 7:32-34), is a reflection of the infinite love which links the three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity, the love to which the Incarnate word bears witness even to the point of giving His life, the love poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which evokes a response of total love for God and the brethren.”

“By embracing chastity, they make their own the pure love of Christ and proclaim to the world that He is the Only-Begotten Son who is one with the Father (Mk. 14:11). “It expresses attachment to God as a lover. To direct human love exclusively to God is the path to perfect freedom and to the attainment of total union with God.”

The presence of the Kingdom of God and God’s unfathomable love so overwhelm the person that he or she cannot do anything but respond through embracing the rare way of consecrated chastity. Basing on this then, we can say that celibacy is not a means to the Kingdom but the result of overwhelming presence of the Kingdom of God.

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29 Ibid. p. 2

30 Vita Consecrata, 21

It is a proof and a sign that the Kingdom of God is already in our midst. The offer of God’s love takes hold of the person that he/she can only do one thing— that is to give oneself entirely to it. So the deliberate chastity becomes a free and deliberate choice as a consequence of an experience of God’s love. The renunciation of marriage becomes a spontaneous and inevitable consequence. They are the people who freely and deliberately choose to become eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom (Mt. 19:11).

“Celibate life expresses attachment to God as a lover. To direct human love exclusively to God who is the path to perfect freedom and to the attainment of total union with God.” This is precisely the reason why Jesus Christ embraced celibacy in order that He can attend to the affairs or business of His Father. This free and deliberate choice has a close reference to the renunciations which Jesus demanded in Mt. 19:29, “Anyone who has left houses, brothers or sisters, or father, or mother, or children or lands for my sake, will receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life” (Mt. 19:29). Scriptures vividly promise us a solid foundation for a life of chastity, poverty and obedience through the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The very life of Jesus was offered as a total holocaust to the Father and His Kingdom as an expression of His deep and undivided love for the Father. This is the essence of His celibate chastity. “Jesus’ existence is a Eucharistic existence: bread handed out, as wine poured out, which, in the very utterances of its self-offering, gives life in its own dying. He neither protected nor gratified His body. His body was

32 It is not unusual that very often on the street or in the store, I meet people who make the Sign of the Cross before they greet me. This humbles me a lot, but at the same time reminds me that I am a sign and therefore should be exemplary and not scandalizes the weak. My own father used to say, “Always remember that you may be the only ‘Bible’ some people will ever read!”

33 Anthony Malaviaratchi, Initiation into Religious Life, ibid. 92.
always the immolated body, the Eucharistic body, handed over. (Luke 22:10). The death on the cross is the supreme movement of the sacrifice that began in the Incarnation.”

It is in this context that we can understand the depth and nature of Christ’s celibate chastity. “It was the great existential sign of His mission in service of the coming of the Kingdom. It was a parable of His death, decided upon out of LOVE.”

Chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven (Mt. 19:12), which the religious profess, must be esteemed as an exceptional gift of grace. It uniquely frees the heart of man (1Cor. 7:32-35), so that he becomes more fervent in love for God and for all men. For this reason it is a most effective means of dedicating themselves whole-heartedly to the divine service and the works of the apostolate. Thus, for all Christ’s faithful, religious recall that wonderful marriage made by God, which will be fully manifested in the future age, and in which the Church has Christ for her only spouse.

Consecrated chastity is not a refusal to love; rather, it is a commitment to love. Sex gets its true meaning and beauty from love and self-giving to the spouse. So does consecrated chastity. The dichotomy between sex and love can lead to the dichotomy between celibacy and love. By renouncing marriage, we do not discard our capacity to love. Celibacy points beyond the here and now; it reminds us that our ultimate human fulfillment is in the kingdom of God. In the midst of our busy, and sometimes shallow lives lives-styles, celibacy if lived positively, is a way of saying there is more to life than this. Moreover, a life of chastity can truly be expressed only in self-giving love; it is as

34 Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God, ibid. 4.

35 Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes. Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God, ibid. 4.

36 Perfectae Caritatis, 12.
valid and as enriching an expression of human sexuality as marriage is.\textsuperscript{37} Through consecrated chastity, celibates in a special way, share in the Church’s spousal relationship with Christ, by being exclusively set apart for Him.\textsuperscript{38} Celibate chastity is a way of life, a gift, a charism that comes with the dawning of God’s Kingdom. “Not all humans can receive this precept but only those to whom it is given” (Mt. 19:11). A gift is something gratuitously and freely given, and freely accepted on the part of the recipient. Thus, Jesus underlines the gift of character of celibate chastity when He further says: “He, who is able to receive this gift, let him receive it” (Mt. 19:12).

Like Christ, celibates vow chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of God that is their response to Christ to follow him intimately in his virginal life. I propose that it is celibacy that makes us free to love God and all people with an undivided heart. Chastity does not make barren, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, enables us to share in the redemptive fruitfulness of Christ’s love for people.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The friendship between celibates could be very successful if only they would respect each other’s commitment and promote faithfulness to their religious vows. Their relationships would be great witness of Christ’s love, not only to their communities, but to the rest of the world. I know of similar ones that go on for years without the least failure. Today there are thousands of priests and nuns around the world who continue to live out their commitment to Christ in extraordinary ways. While some of the unhealthy friendships among some celibates serve as warning signs of the implicit danger of


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. 103.
friendship which may lead to erotic love, I still do not maintain that friendship between a man and a woman is an impossible ideal. It should be taken into consideration however that these men and women who took the vow of celibacy are human in every sense of the word, who strive to answer to the call of God and the Church Community to the best of their ability, weak and vulnerable as any other person, yet most of them exhibit extraordinary sacrifice, commitment and love.\textsuperscript{39}

I have experienced being sexual as a woman committed to a celibate life. Drawing from what Bishop Martin shares with me, I can safely say that we are both sexual and celibate. For almost half a century, we have both traveled only the path of celibate commitment within religious life and we are very happy. A choice to a vowed commitment to celibacy in religious life is a choice made for the purpose of loving and serving other human beings. Human fulfillment is found in cherishing and nurturing others even when it costs us something and whether or not we get something out of it. It is the respectful, non-possessive, non-manipulative, nurturing and accepting of the beloved which makes fulfillment possible. It is with this in mind that I turn to the next chapter: a discussion of celibacy’ theoretical foundations.

\textsuperscript{39} From the Commentary in the Guest Column by Father Satish Joseph. The Catholic telegraph April 30, 2010
II. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CELIBACY AND CHASTITY

In this chapter, I am going to discuss the vow of celibacy and the virtue of chastity. Starting with Jesus Christ who is the model of celibates in both chastity and friendship, I will analyze different dimensions of religious chastity and show how these dimensions can help celibates in nurturing their human friendships while faithfully living their vowed life and eventually help them to reach their final goal, divine friendship. These dimensions will be discussed under the following headings; Chastity as a Charism, Religious Chastity as a Sign, Community Dimension of Religious Chastity, Missionary and Apostolic Dimension. These characteristics of the vows in general form a single framework of life. It is a way of life defined by the gift of one’s life to God in love. The vows open the celibate to trust in God’s companion and become the channels of His love. A framework for love stipulates what will be expected as signs of love, as deeds of love, and as efforts to make love continue to grow.

The vow of chastity is a promise made to God to give up marriage and renounce all external and internal acts forbidden by the sixth and ninth commandments under pain of double sin; one against the law of God and the other against the virtue of religion. This vow contains two elements namely; the voluntary forgoing of marriage, giving up my natural right to marry and a voluntary renunciation of all interior and exterior acts
forbidden by the Divine Law. God wants us to be fully human and mature. We should develop our distinctive womanly and motherly qualities of warmth, understanding and disinterested love in our celibate way of life in community and in our devoted service to others. Our vow of chastity is preserved more securely when we live a community life in sisterly love, foster healthy friendships, practice mortification, self-discipline and dedicate ourselves wholeheartedly to the apostolate. This teaching is grounded on both Jesus’ Ethics and the Theology of the Trinity.

Although sometimes celibacy and chastity are used interchangeably, these two words are not quite synonyms. Chastity is a moral virtue which checks, controls, and moderates, or excludes the desire and pleasure of carnal or sexual thoughts or actions. All are called to be chaste, but celibacy is a particular kind of chastity. Celibacy is a state of life governing exterior acts, simply the state of being, for whatever reason, unmarried. But chastity is also applicable to married persons. Consecrated celibacy is the defining characteristic of religious life as a public lifestyle in the Church. It is embraced for religious or supernatural motive, not out of necessity, misfortune, or coercion. The celibate commitment has traditionally included an effort to avoid the formation of exclusive relationships with anyone. Celibates are to love all people, and they can

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40 Constitution and Directory of the Sisters of the Child Jesus, Driefontein: Zimbabwe, 1989 No., 21. I had to learn and understand this for five years before committing myself as a religious member of the SJI in which I have served God in different capacities for 36 years. To claim that these years were accomplished without any problems especially pertaining to human relationships would be far from the truth. Together with the Psalmist I can only gratefully sing: it was grace that brought me this far.

41 Ibid. No., 20.

42 Ibid, No. 21.

naturally form good friendships with people, but the vow precludes a relationship becoming exclusive of other people.

The vow of lifelong chastity is one of the oldest and the most enduring of all the vows. In Christian religious life, it entails a life-long commitment. This is also ideal in the monastic system of other great religions but the practice is somewhat different. In all the great monastic systems, celibacy denotes single-mindedness, an unencumbered devotion to God and to the development of spiritual life.\(^{44}\) It is unique among the vows professed by the religious. It is the only vow whose content has been a constant factor in all forms of religious life throughout history. It is also the only one of the three vows whose object is, strictly speaking; an evangelical counsel’ in the sense that it is a response to an invitation not addressed to all Christians. It is the defining characteristic of religious life.\(^{45}\)

Chastity / celibacy is freely chosen and lived for evangelical reasons. It is viewed as a commitment of love and not just a renunciation of marriage and sex. To view this merely as a renunciation has a great repercussion in the actual living out of the vow of chastity. The old, traditional understanding of chastity which focuses more on denial and renunciation and a negative attitude toward sexuality and marriage as a Christian vocation is seen today as characterized by fear, guilt, repression, and landing to serious affective under-development in many religious.\(^{46}\) This might explain why certain


\(^{46}\) Ibid., pp. 91-92
relationships become disastrous. The celibates involved might actually be naïve in cultivating friendships.

Consecrated chastity points to the primacy of God’s love. The love can take hold of us so overwhelmingly, that we become incapable of marriage; we lose our taste for marriage, for in faith we have tasted something better. The deepest cause for a life of celibacy is the uncompromising nature of love for God who as the fullness of love unshakably grips us first. Thus, celibate chastity relativizes the all-important reality of marriage and family; and shows that God’s love alone is absolute.

Chastity expresses respect of oneself and others. It is blemished if I look for sensual pleasure in another person for my own selfish ends. Chastity is a force that measures and a strength that masters and spiritualizes all acts of relationship between human beings. It assures the victory of the spirit over carnal attraction in our more intimate relationships, particularly those involving persons of a different sex. Thus it must be clear from all this that society has an absolute need of chastity and could not survive without it. To say exactly what is chaste and what is not is very difficult. Moralists have given us a number of material rules that may quiet people’s conscience, yet still do not do justice to the splendors of chastity. It would be an error to suppose that all acts done because one loves are chaste. The relationship with the person in question has also to be considered. Adulterous love cannot be chaste. In our own eyes we may justify our every action because, we say, we are urged on by love and this seems to us sincerity. But sincerity and truth are not always synonyms. An impulse that carried us instinctively to seek for physical contact with a person we love cannot be justified simply on the grounds of its
spontaneity. This spontaneity has to be controlled unless we want to make human relationships impossible.

Sometimes we imagine we can be angels and love like them. It is an idle dream. When we love, our whole being is moved. In divine as in human love it is the same. Even in our love of God there can be a problem, for when we look for deep sensual satisfactions in the manifestations of his love we may be lacking in total chastity. And yet we cannot help throwing our whole being, flesh and spirit, into the search for God. Perhaps that is why many people fall into the other extremes and thinks they can cultivate friendships that are far from being Chaste. They allow themselves acts only suitable for married people. Even without going so far, they behave like lovers in search of felt manifestations of love. So there are touches, fondling and kisses, which they think are very innocent, but in reality are impure in the friendship they are trying to manifest. If so many priests, religious men and women have given up celibacy for marriage, it is too often because they have gone for this type of relationship with only a hazy notion of chastity. They were looking for a friendship they really needed. But it became mutual self-seeking, and, as it developed, an attachment began that was out of place because it was at the expense of the love they owed the Lord. More and more liberties were taken until the only possible solution was to get married. And yet it is possible to live great friendships in celibacy as evidenced by outstanding examples in the history of the church, some well known, and others less in the public eye. So we should not think it an impossibility to love a man or woman when our heart is given to God. In fact, not only are these friendships not contrary to chastity but they can develop into a marvelous love of God.
The Chastity of Christ

Jesus Christ is the model of Christian chastity. It is the very life of Jesus that this virtue of chastity is perfectly lived, revealed and disclosed. He is the point of reference not only for Christians but also for religious. Apart from Christian chastity (Chastity of Christ), consecrated chastity or the vow of chastity is incomprehensible. It would be easier to understand the chastity of Christ in relation to purity. “Purity, as defined and explained by Kierkegaard, is to will one thing only.”47 Purity of heart can be referred to as single-mindedness, unadulterated love and cleanness of heart. “Whoever can love can be pure. ‘Whoever can be pure can be chaste.’”48 Purity as a Christian virtue is founded in love. Christian love, which is the core of Christian values, is the total self-giving to the other. In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, He extolled the virtue of purity. “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God” (Mt. 5:8). God Himself is pure, unblemished, all-holy, and unstained by sin and concupiscence. Whoever will live this virtue will likewise experience the beatific vision of God, who is pure, Himself.

Following the principle that whoever can love can be pure and whoever can be pure can be chaste, Jesus Christ is the model of perfect love, and therefore He is pure not because He is celibate but because His sole concern is the Father. He was fully absorbed with the Father’s concern, which is the Kingdom of God. For Jesus, “the Kingdom or Reign of God was His great mission, the motive for His incarnation.”49 True, Jesus was born and became one among us out of love and He died out of love. Therefore, He was

47 Ibid., 47.
48 Ibid., 46.
49 Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God, ibid. 2.
indeed chaste. “Love led Christ to the gift of self, even to the supreme sacrifice of the cross. So too, among His disciples, there can be no true unity without that unconditional, mutual love which demands a readiness to serve others generously, a willingness to welcome them as they are, without judging them (Mt. 7:1-2) and an ability to forgive (Mat. 18:22).”

Regarding purity of heart, Jesus did not only forbid adultery but also impure thoughts and desires. Thus, he said, “I say to you that anyone who does much as look with lust at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt. 5:28). According to the Webster dictionary chaste means pure in thought and act, innocent of unlawful sexual intercourse; celibate; severely simple in design or execution; clean or spotless.

Jesus did not only teach the virtue of purity/chastity but lived it with steadfastness and faithfulness. If Christian chastity is viewed in the context of purity, then virtue is addressed to all Christians regardless of their vocation in life. Married Christians can practice the virtue of chastity by being faithful to one person only, his wife/her husband. Religious and celibate persons are expected to love God above all else and be preoccupied with His affairs and concerns. Jesus’ way of loving is the purest and most perfect. He wanted that His way of loving must be the standard of loving also for His followers. “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn. 15:12).

Though not married, Jesus Christ still finds fecundity in His celibate chastity by devoting Himself wholeheartedly to the Father’s concerns or business, giving Himself totally to the Father in love through His loving service for the building of His Kingdom

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50 Vita Consecrata, 42b.

here on earth. The fruitfulness of His ministry finds its origin/source in His virginal relationship with the Father. “God the Father is, for Jesus, the one worthy of being loved above all things, because there is no reality that can compare with Him in beauty, goodness, existential richness or capacity to attract.”

“The world must know that I love the Father and do as the Father has commanded me” (Jn. 14:31). The overwhelming love of Jesus for the Father motivates Him to offer Himself as a holocaust of love, even to the point of dying on the cross. The will of the Father becomes His food and drink; His daily nourishment. With this unconditional love shown by the Son, the Father finds all His delight in the Son. Thus, the Father acknowledges it by saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mt. 3:17).

Indeed, the celibate chastity of Jesus enables Him to devote Himself wholeheartedly to the concerns of the Father. When His parents found Him in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking questions, they asked Him, “Why have you done this to us?” His answer was ‘did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”(Lk.2:48-49). Jesus is indeed the “eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom” (Mt. 19:11-12). “So great is the drawing power that the Kingdom exerts on Jesus that He remains incapacitated for matrimony? He had to be the mediator of the Father’s love to all humankind, the parable of God, the Spouse of His people.”

“He came to give life to all,

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52 Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, Celibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God, ibid. 6-7.

53 Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, Ceibacy – Virginity for the Kingdom of God, ibid. pp. 6-7.
abundant and eternal life” through His death. His affective life was absolutely gratified and fulfilled in His unconditional relationship of love with the Father.

Celibate chastity of the Kingdom is then a sharing in Christ’s own way of life. Christ the Lord Himself is the model of the virginal life of religious. He is more than a model. He is also the source of our celibacy and consecrated chastity. Here, we can conclude that celibacy is a gift to us of Jesus’ own celibate way of life. Renunciation of marriage for the sake of the Kingdom in actual practice means celibacy for the sake of Christ. It is present where God truly rules, where His will is precisely obeyed in love.

Chastity as a Charism

A charism is a special gift; chastity is a gift from God which we receive in a genuine call to religious life. Consecrated chastity is the gift of the Holy Trinity. It is a charism given to some whom God wills. In faith and love we accept this gift and respond to it by living this vow in daily loving commitment to Christ. Consecrated chastity involves total self-giving as a response to the call from God to value a plan of life and mission which is primarily the worship and close imitation of Jesus Christ. What is this mission for which a person makes this holocaust of self? “He who renounces matrimony confesses publicly his/her trust to find God, fulfillment of his/her needs of love; he/she attests with his life to treasure and to believe in the promise of the Gospel; to demonstrate in the person that eternal life is a reality which already has begun on this earth.” The vow of chastity is a real holocaust of body and soul, a holocaust made as the most direct and

54 Ibid.

55 Anthony Malaviaratchi, Initiation Into Religious Life, ibid. p.94

56 Joyce Ridick, Treasures in earthen Vessels: The Vows, ibid. p. 49.
rapid way to the perfection of chastity. The soul is given through love, the body through chastity. It is a joyful and loving acceptance of a celibate chastity as a permanent way of life, out of our desire to imitate Jesus Christ who is the object of our love.

Chastity frees the human heart in a remarkable manner (1Cor. 7:32-35), so that it burns with love for God and all people. One of the greatest contributions which celibates can bring to humanity today is certainly that of revealing, by their life more than by their words, the possibility of true dedication to, and openness towards others, in sharing in their joys, in being faithful and constant in love without a thought of domination or exclusiveness. Consecrated chastity brings about a special relationship with the Person of Jesus Christ in that it gives Christ in a real concrete way the central place that is given to the spouse in a good marriage. Christ becomes the spouse, the life-partner. Just as genuine marriage takes place only when two people are fascinated by each other’s love, so too, joyful celibacy is possible only if we are fascinated by Christ’s love. The absolute claim that Christ has on us is made real as possible – martyrdom alone surpasses celibacy in this regard. By actual renunciation, a life of celibacy shows that Christ’s love is real as the love of a good spouse. It unites us to Christ because celibacy makes a gift of self to Christ, just as does marriage to the partner in life.

Religious Chastity as a Sign

A sign (according to the Webster dictionary) is something material or external that indicates the presence or existence of something else. It signifies or points to reality.\(^{57}\) The vow of chastity is a sign which essentially points to Christ, His Church and His

future kingdom. It can therefore be described as a Christological, Ecclesiological and Eschatological sign.

Chastity is a profound love and imitation of Christ and so is a Christological sign. As the life of Jesus was directed toward the proclamation of the presence and the coming of the Kingdom of God in spirit of love and service (Agape), so are religious the light and salt of the world, towards the same end. He renounced physical, sexual gratification, or intimate expression, and the companionship of a life partner. This must be our choice or way of life, too. Christ shows us in His celibate life a way of giving ourselves totally to the Kingdom (Mt. 9:12). Jesus also shows us the meaning of faith; a faith which must be expressed by a free action that God alone suffices; that God alone brings me to self-regulation and fullness of life.

As an ecclesiological sign, consecrated chastity is a sign of the Church. “It embraces and gives witness, in a visible way, to the Church’s relationship with Christ as spousal relationship of total oneness.”⁵⁸ Celibates who embraced consecrated chastity place themselves at the total service of the Church, at the service of Redemption, following the chaste and pure Christ whose love and service extends to all people. This undivided love, expressed concretely in apostolic mission, is not merely utilitarian: we do not make a vow of chastity so we can work more. We do make a vow of chastity in order that we may live more a life totally dependent on faith, hope and love. Our undivided love for Christ is a sacrament of Christ’s undivided love for the Church. Celibates in a special

⁵⁸ Anthony Malaviaratchi; Initiation Into Religious Life, ibid, 107.
way, share in the Church’s spousal relationship with Christ, by being exclusively set apart for Him.59

Chastity is a reminder of our final end in eternity and so is also an eschatological sign. It points to the eternal heavenly condition of human beings after their resurrection, when there will be no marriage and we shall be totally united to God as with a spouse. Chastity thus becomes a manifestation of the grace and the constant call to transcendence. It is also a manifestation of faith and hope in God; a belief that in the final reality we will be taken up into God where there’s no more weeping or gnashing of teeth; no emptiness of loneliness or unfulfilled desires, where there will be eternal communion and blessedness with the Father; where love will reign through consecrated chastity. Celibates live this already here on earth.60

Religious are called to witness to the love and relatedness of God because God’s new reign has caught up with people. It is not an eschatological sign reminding us that our true home is in heaven. It is a sign that God’s love has struck roof in our earthly and human condition.61 Consecrated chastity is an efficacious means of directing the spiritual and natural energies of the person for the Kingdom of God. Loving God unconditionally involves loving one’s fellowmen. The goal of chastity is to bring the human nature to perfection in love: for religious, in the radical love of God. Freedom of heart means the release from egoism, in an integrated psyche that seeks God alone.

59 Ibid. p. 107
60 Joyce Ridick, Treasures in Earthen Vessels; The Vows, ibid., 50 -52.
Community Dimension of Religious Chastity

Religious chastity or the vow of chastity is better lived in the community. “Because religious community is a school of love (Schola Amoris) which helps one grow in love for God and for one’s brothers and sisters, it is also a place for human growth.”\(^{62}\) Community life must be fostered and deepened to allow space and growth for each member and to develop to its fullest their capacity to become fecund for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Religious community becomes a concrete place and a training ground where a celibate can better incarnate, express, and live God’s commandment of love, “Love God with all your heart…and love your neighbor as you love yourself,” (Mat. 22: 37- 39). “Love one another as I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13: 34-35). It is where the value of religious chastity as a sign becomes very expressive dynamic, and alive. Religious community as a gift/charism is a sign of a Trinitarian communion, an ecclesial communion, a place for becoming brothers and sisters. It also becomes the place and subject of mission. Religious community invites the religious to be a sign of unity. Our highest vocation is “to enter into communion with God and with our brothers and sisters.”\(^{63}\) Through a common life, celibates share in Trinitarian communion, which can change human relationship and create a new type of solidarity. This unity gives them a new identity of being one and multiple at the same time like the mystery of the Triune God. Christianity has always believed that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The

\(^{62}\) Fraternal Life in Community, 35.

\(^{63}\) Fraternal Life in Community.
Trinity is three distinct Persons who are One God in communion, relation, and love. “Consecrated person’s life is for God and from God, and precisely for this reason they are able to bear witness to the reconciling power of grace, which overcomes the division tendencies present in the human heart and society.”

Moreover, a religious community can be a safeguard against temptations that beset the religious in their spiritual journey. It becomes their support, their shield, their refuge. It is also an oasis of love where they can be refreshed through the love and care of the members of the community. “Above all, everyone should remember – superiors especially, that chastity has strong safeguards in a community when true fraternal love thrives among its members.” It is quite true that the quality of fraternal or communal life has significant impact on the perseverance of individual religious. Just as the poor quality of fraternal life has been mentioned frequently by many as the reason for leaving religious life, so fraternity lived fully has often been, and still is, a valuable support for the perseverance of many.

As celibates, living in a community must become an oasis where everyone is refreshed, nourished, and developed by its life-giving water. When the community fails to be life-giving and growth-enhancing, whether knowingly or unknowingly, this experience will gradually eat away the energy from the members and their personal commitment will be affected. Celibacy needs nourishment more than life-support system. It involves the way we relate with the one with whom we are intimate. This involves mutual disclosure and sharing, nurturing and correction, support and challenge. Mutual

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64 Vita Consecrata, 41 b.

65 Potissimum Intitutioni, 12
disclosure and sharing is to involve the other or others, in the deepest part of one’s life stories and relationships. It must not remain at the level of ‘what did you do?’ but ‘how do you feel about that?’ and ‘what do you think about it?’ It involves people beyond the surface to deal with the feelings of anger, fear, losses and disappointments. It celebrates each other’s joys and hopes; their successes and dreams.66

Within a truly fraternal community, each member has a sense of co-responsibility for the faithfulness of the others; each one contributes to a serene climate of sharing life, of understanding, and of mutual help; each is attentive to the moments of fatigue, suffering, isolation, or lack of motivation in others; each offers support to those who are saddened by difficulties and trials. Thus, religious communities, in the support they give to the perseverance of their members also acquire the value of a sign of the abiding fidelity of God, and thus become a support to the faith and fidelity of Christians who are immersed in the events of this world, where the paths of fidelity seem to be less and less known.67

The mystery of God’s giving and loving is but expressed not in isolation but in the communion or interpersonal relationship with others especially in the community. It is a privilege of encountering concretely the Persons of the Holy Trinity, not merely in theory. “To live a life of consecrated or religious celibacy/chastity means to build a community of true love and friendship.”68 Love becomes central in the living out of the vow of chastity. Love of God is made concrete in one’s love of neighbor and vice versa.

“Community that is not mystical has no soul, but community that is not ascetic has no

66 Michael H. Crosby, *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart*, 177-179

67 Fraternal Life In Community, 57.

68 Consecrated Celibacy, Ibid. 158.
body. Synergy between the gift of God and personal commitment is required for building an incarnated communion, for giving, in other words, flesh and concrete existence to grace and to the gift of fraternal communion.”

The vow of chastity calls for an integrity of behavior. That is not easy, as one enters into the complications, which arise in human intimacy. All relationships in a celibate’s life have to be judged as to their place in the primary relationship promised to God and the commitment to grow in love implied in the vow. To live a life of consecrated celibacy/ chastity means to build up a community of true love and friendship. This in turn requires the ability to relate with others, with self, with creation, and above all, with God. This is absolutely necessary to grow as persons, as Christians, and as religious. Chastity is not about abstinence from sexual thoughts and acts but about engaging with daily struggles and challenges of authentic sexual and relational growth.

**Missionary and Apostolic Dimension of Religious Chastity**

As Jesus assumed celibate chastity for the sake of the Kingdom, so must His followers who are gifted with this particular charism. There are many reasons why people are celibate, but for those who are called and have positively responded to His invitation, the motive must be service in love for the sake of the Reign of God. Like any other vows, consecrated chastity has also a missionary dimension. “For the sake of the Kingdom, Jesus created a community around Him. For the sake of the Kingdom he and His

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6969 Fraternal Life In Community, 23.

70 Ibid. 247.

71 E. Blais, Consecrated Celibacy, ibid, p. 150.
community put themselves at the service of all people, especially that of the most needy. The celibacy for which Jesus opted qualified His style of mission.”

The mission of Jesus was not carried out alone by Himself but in communion with all the members of His mystical body. We are His extended body consecrated for the sake of God’s Kingdom. We are His heads, hands, hearts and feet on earth. We adapt His lifestyle and missionary spirit. Like Jesus, religious vowed to consecrated chastity must also bear the marks which Jesus bore in His very flesh; these are the marks of His commitment to love. Love was the sole reason of His birth and the sole reason of His death. Love is a very powerful force that brings everybody into one single family of God. It is love that enables us to become courageous people of our time who announce and proclaim to all humankind the goodness and the Fatherhood of God and who denounce the “excessive and discriminatory society and the affective marginalization to millions of human persons are submitted.” Following the chaste and celibate Jesus is a “form of availability to work, in the midst of risks, for justice, love, peace and fraternity: for the great values of the Kingdom. It is a sign and source of deeply committed and universal fraternity.”

Just as poverty brought Jesus closer to the poorest of the poor, so celibacy brought Him closer to the lonely of this world. Thus, through the Person of Jesus, one of the unhappy situations of humankind, aloneness could be incorporated into the Kingdom of His Abba. Through His celibacy, Jesus proclaimed that every man and woman, without

72 Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Peredes, Celibacy-Virginity for the Kingdom of God, ibid. 19.
73 Ibid. 20.
74 Ibid. 20-21.
excluding absolutely anyone, and especially those who were most alone on earth, were called to form the unique family of the children of God.\textsuperscript{75}

The chastity of Jesus for the sake of the Kingdom is also a real way of overcoming the fear of the opposite sex as a temptation, in order to recover a brother or sister celibate as a companion in the liberating mission of the Gospel. The, mission is not carried out in solitude but in company or in communion with others. We men and women, must rediscover one another as companions; we should once more, as in the earliest days, walk together, always free and mature, and thus come to reunite what has been conventually separated in the religious life, on the basis of so many fears. Consecrated chastity / virginity assumed for the sake of the Kingdom enables the religious to make present in the midst of the world God’s love and passion for humankind. It manifests that the heart of God, is above all, with the most oppressed of His children in order to rescue them, and it denounces the power of the evil one. So must our love be disinterested and committed to firmly fight against unbridled eroticism, against commercialization of sex, and against the hedonistic and selfish invasion of life in our times.

Virginal love for the Kingdom must inspire religious towards actions and initiatives of a striking generosity on behalf of the lonely and the abandoned. It is manifested in the missionary and diaconal caring of men and women who are not afraid of losing their life for others, who are not overly concerned with preserving it. It is a love, a life totally offered as a holocaust to God for life.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. 19-20.

\textsuperscript{76} Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Peredes, Celibacy -Virginity for the Kingdom of God, ibid. 20-23.
Consecrated/vowed chastity is a call, a gift and charism, and a task. It is a call initiated by God the Father to follow His Son Jesus Christ, who is chaste, through the power of the Holy Spirit. “Through it the Spirit conforms us to the virginity/chastity of Jesus Christ; it brings us to ‘re-present in the Church’ the virginal/chaste lifestyle of Christ Jesus”.\(^7\) As a charism, “it is a grace gift given to an individual for the sake of the community. Of its nature, it is a call to service of others in some way”.\(^7\) It is also a gift to be valued since it is not given to all but only to whomever God wills and however He wills. As a task, it needs the collaboration of the one called. It is an unfinished project, which needs a human cooperation. “It is a gift in germinal stage that does not unfold without the collaboration of freedom. The Spirit, who grants the gift of chastity/virginity without human initiative, does not bring to its fullness without free human collaboration”.\(^7\)

Vowed chastity is a journey by which one becomes a living person through commitment to the Person of Jesus. It is a commitment to love. Religious life is based on the belief that one has been touched by God.

**Conclusion**

It is crucial for us religious to accept the limitations which celibacy places on our love. Love between man and woman forcefully drives toward sharing genital pleasure. Celibate love requires not merely self-denial but a way of expressing love. It places limits on physical expression. Celibate love means many good-byes that leave the spirit twisted

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\(^7\) E. Blais, ET. Al., *Consecrated Celibacy*, (Canada: Canadian Religious Conference, 1971), p. 50.

\(^7\) Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Celibacy-Virginity for the Kingdom of God*, ibid., p.12
and torn and wondering how often it can endure such torture. It means enduring aching, painful absences for long periods of time, perhaps with meager communication. It is painful because it strikes at the very core of a love relationship. Celibate love is a continual, mutual, intimate sharing, supporting, and caring between two people in friendship with affection. Separation interrupts that living together which is the essence of friendship. It entails tensions to be borne, conflicts to be resolved, and hard choices to be made. Tensions, conflicts, and hard choices occur between a celibate’s ideals and the feeling experienced in love between woman and man. To be loved is a gift or it is not being loved at all. We cannot dictate a gift, what it shall be or how it shall be wrapped. Celibates who experience love between man and woman will likely at first be so fascinated by the loved one that they will be deaf to the call to give themselves generously to God in prayer and to others in human affection. Celibates’ love must be inclusive not exclusive.  

I do not believe that an effort to pursue such a definition of celibacy as I presented above causes an individual to act out sexually in ways to which the person wasn't already predisposed. In other words, celibacy does not make one a pedophile, nor does it cause one to have homosexual attractions. The inclination and or the disposition are not the issue, but the exercise of one’s sexual powers by the one who took the vow of chaste celibacy. Once a person violates a vow of celibacy that was made to God and the Church, the seriousness of the vow will often impel the person to try again, but having broken the vow will have made it easier to fall again. Once one has broken the vow a little, the vow

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is broken. It is then tempting to go ahead and get it all out of your system before repenting.

In this chapter, I have tried to say that celibacy is an expression of love. Christ is the model of chastity. Its meaning is more symbolic than practical. The vow of chastity witnesses to the deep love that is friendship. In living our vow of chastity, it is our hope that we are witnesses to the God who loved us first and showed Himself to us in the Person of Christ. In giving oneself unreservedly to Christ, celibates open themselves to a friendship which is mutual and universal. Freed of the exclusive dimension which is proper to conjugal love, they are open to receive, and to love all as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Embracing a celibate way of life does not mean blocking god-given capacity to love. Instead, it enhances personal growth and fruitfulness; ennobles and purifies our capacity to love in an inclusive manner. It is an invitation to enter into a relationship and grow more like christ, who developed intimacy with the father. The discussion of the vow of celibacy is pertinent to this thesis about celibate friendship because god wants us to be fully human and mature. It is important for celibates to develop understanding and disinterested love in their celibate way of life, both in community and in their devoted service to others. How celibates live out human friendship is critical preparation for their friendship with god.
III. HUMAN FRIENDSHIP AS LOVE

Having discussed theological foundations of celibacy, in this chapter, I will discuss friendship. Friendship is the very core of the Christian message as mentioned in Scripture. Jesus’ view of friendship is the relational nature of humans created in the image of God and the Trinitarian relationship. Friendship between celibates could be seen as perfect companionship. I will show that at the root of all our loves is our love for God. I will conclude this section by suggesting some means of growth in celibate friendship which include; discipline, prayer, meditation and celibate intimacy.

Love in the Bible is a relationship of self giving, friendship, a relationship of mutual trust and congeniality. While many biblical writers realized that friendship enriches human life, as a subject of serious reflection the theme of friendship is not developed in the bible and this is in sharp contrast to the Greek and Roman traditions. Although Deuteronomy 13:6 characterizes a friend as a person “who is as your own soul” the mutual affection and devotion of David and Jonathan strike the readers of the Old Testament as extraordinary (1Sm. 18:1; 19: 1; 20: 17; 2 Sm. 1: 26). Where the covenant concept prevails natural attraction and personal preference appear to be less important than covenant obligations as the bases of relationships between persons.

The benefits and requirements of friendship are among the subjects addressed by Israel’s wise men, especially in Proverbs and Ecclesiastics. The sage stresses loyalty and
steadfastness as marks of the true friend (Prov. 17:17; 18: 24; Eccles. 6: 14-16) but warns that poverty or adversity often reveals people to be friends in name only Pr. 19: 4, 6-7; 13; 21, 37: 4-5). An irony of the book of Job is that Job’s three friends, in their frantic attempts to effect his repentance, intensify rather than relieve his suffering. Because Job’s friends are more loyal to their theological certainties than to Job, they are unable to attain the genuine sympathy that marks real friendship.

**Friendship with God**

The special bond between God and a person chosen as his instrument is occasionally described as friendship. God spoke to Moses face to face, “as a man speaks to his friend” (Exod. 33: 11), and Abraham is called God’s friend (2Chron. 20: 7; Is. 41: 8). Those individuals who are truly wise in the Old Testament sense, that is, those who perfectly observe God’s law, are said to be the friends of God: “For, to men Wisdom is an unfailing treasure; those who gain this treasure win the friendship of God, to whom the gifts they have from discipline commend them” (Wis. 7:14). “And she, who is one, can do all things, and renews everything while herself enduring; and passing into holy souls from age to age, she produces friends of God and prophets” (7:27). Accordingly, Abraham and Moses are called friends of God.

In the New Testament, Jesus calls his disciples friends: “You are my friends if you do the things I command you. No longer do I call you servants, because the servant does not know what his master does. Jesus says that his disciples are his friends if they do what he commands; he calls them friends because he has revealed to them what he heard from his Father (Jn.15: 14-15). To be Jesus’ friends is to love one another (15: 12). In a saying highly reminiscent of the Greek tradition, Jesus declares that the supreme manifestation
of love is a person’s willingness to give his life for his friends. A man can have no greater
love than to lay down his life for his friends (15: 13). The love of which Jesus speaks is
one, but many. It begins with the Father’s love for Christ (15: 12-13), is reciprocated in
the disciple’s loving obedience to Christ (10, 14), and radiates out through their love for
one another (12, 17). It is love that will be the source of their joy (11) and the essential
condition of their intimate friendship with the Lord (14-15). The model of love for all
ture discipleship is extreme, limitless; for it is Jesus himself who lays down his life for
his friends (13) as does the good shepherd of 10: 11-18. Yet it is precisely for love like
this that Jesus has chosen them. They will bring forth enduring fruit; their prayers will be
answered, to the extent that they love one another (16-17).

The theological background for Jesus’ view of friendship is the relational nature of
humans created in the image of God and the Trinitarian “friendship” relationship within
the personhood of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is a social bond of love,
mutual respect, common interest and relational joy in which human beings share. This is
what John writes about when he says, “Our fellowship is with the Father and with his
Son, Jesus Christ” (1 Jn. 1: 3). Behind the verse in 1 John 4: 16, “God is love,” is the
implication that whoever lives in friendship lives in God. If one lives in God by following
the greatest commandment and loving God, one’s friend, as well as one’s neighbor. The
parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk.10:29-37) and the narrative of Martha and Mary and
the need to spend time with Jesus their friend (38-42) are very specific examples of how
to love both God and one’s neighbor in friendship.
Friendship is at the very core of the Christian message. It is a sharing of things divine. Christians know that the ultimate end or goal of the human person is to enjoy friendship with God. Cudderback argues;

Christians seem to have two extra motives for examining human friendship beyond the importance it has in itself; first an understanding of human friendship enhances our understanding of friendship with God. Indeed if we do not understand true human friendship, we will be hampered in understanding friendship with God. Second and even more pressing, human friendship is the natural preparation for entering into friendship with God.81

To those he called, Christ said: “I call you friends, I told you everything the Father told me” (Jn. 15: 15). Human love is only but a reflection of the Trinity. By the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, God’s love is made present. Such a view is seen throughout the Christian history. Paul Wadell suggests in his commentary on Augustine that; “the only true friendship is one which originates in this outpouring of God’s love, for it is only these friendships born from the Spirit that can achieve what every friendship needs to achieve, the union of the friends with God in a Kingdom of friendship with all.”82

The mystery of the Trinity is central to the Christian life, hence to friendship. God alone can make it known to us by revealing Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is love. He freely wills to communicate the glory of his blessed life that is doing in the

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world what it takes to make and to keep human life human. The old adage “Blood is thicker than water!” is done away with by God’s loving kindness, conceived by the Father before the foundation of the world, in his beloved Son: “He destined us in love to be his sons and daughters to be confirmed to the image of the Son,” through “the Spirit of Son-ship” (Rom. 8: 15, 29). This plan is a grace, which was given to us in Christ before the ages began, stemming immediately from Trinitarian love. It unfolds in the work of creation, the whole history of salvation after the fall, and the missions of the Son and the Spirit, which are continued in the mission of the Church. The ultimate end of the whole Divine Economy is the entry of God’s creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity. But even now we are called to be a dwelling for the Most Holy Trinity. “If a man loves me,” says the Lord, “he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him (Jn. 14: 23). This leads to human maturity which is only possible by the power of the Divine Activity.

At the root of all our loves is our love for God. God as the one who loved us first, God as our homecoming, God as the open arms into which we rush, God as the response to the most poignant hopes held tightly to our hearts. No matter whom or what we love, at the core of the impulse to open and to go out of self or to draw into self is that fundamental love. Because of this, all loves have the potential to bring us into closer union with the source and goal of love, God. Moreover, God is present in the dynamics of loving not only as beginning and end but in the very process itself. God’s own life is experienced in the very desire we feel that propels us to rush passionately toward one another and to open ourselves to that passionate embrace.
The central dynamic of loving is desire, the yearning to be with the other, to share thoughts and feelings, to nourish the bond of intimacy. The desire that feeds the human relationship finds its source in our desire for God, for we do not have two hearts, namely; one that loves God and one that loves people. We have only one heart and within it one capacity for love. There may be several different types of love such as; familial, spouse; the erotic search of the lover for the beloved; love of friends; love of the larger community; love of God, but they are not separate or necessarily antithetical. They are all part of one general movement of desire that compels us, however obscurely, to live more fully, more intimately, and ultimately, to direct both our own and others’ love together home to God.

**Human Friendship**

Friendship can do just that, for friendship is one particular type of love; a special love that is by definition mutual and equal. In other relationships, one can love without being returned, but in friendship both partners must participate. And while there can be difference and complementarity, at bottom the friendship is nurtured in the apprehension that the friends, in the eyes of the other as well as in the eyes of God, are equal worth. Just as there are many loves, of which friendship is only one, so among friendships there is variety. I speak here especially of the type of friendship enjoyed by a man and a woman in which the context of the partners’ lives calls for the construction of a relationship that is at once intimate and erotic and yet does not involve the physical expression of that intimacy. I confine myself to friendship between celibate persons.
“Friendship is a particular type of relationship, which is not only permissible but also encouraged as a genuine means of concretizing the love of God in us, and of self-transcendence.” True friendship will indeed provide opportunities for transcendence since we need to accept everyone despite their limitations/weaknesses even when self-gratification is absent. Pope John Paul II says that while the affective is necessary in relationships, the affective life should not become the driving force of our existence. It should not generate to the sensual, but be integrated into a plan of love.83

“A friendship is authentic when it becomes more and more enrichment for fraternal life in community, besides for those who enjoy this friendship. This is the key point. Friendship is a great experience of love; if it is authentic, it strengthens the whole affective life of the consecrated. From a Christian point of view, you cannot love God; share in His universal love, without loving everything He loves, and tending to love it as much as He loves it infinitely. We cannot love the God of the people, without loving the people of God. Charity embraces everything.”84 God’s love is inclusive; it excludes no one. Both homosexual and heterosexual friendships need a certain degree of maturity on the part of those involved. This is possible in the life of the consecrated. Both must maintain an interior freedom, that is, their minds and hearts must be anchored in God.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, teaching on chastity and friendship, called it “perfect companionship.” During the first years after his conversion, he was surrounded by women admirers, whom he guided toward a very deep encounter with Christ. He knew


84 John Thadathil, Handouts on Evangelical Counsels and Consecrated life, ibid. 119.
from experience that he needed to be prudent and fully master of himself. He was not
looking for intimacy with the persons to whom he was devoted. Extremely sober in his
words and signs of affection, he proposed his own experience as a light toward the
intimacy with God which he himself enjoyed. The cultivation and deepening of
friendship between celibates can be seen in the light of the Ignatian ideal of perfect
companionship. With a total devotion to the persons loved, forgetting ourselves, we
should try to take our friends with us into the very heart of God. As suggested, “First, the
author and giver of friendship is God. Second, friendship must be rooted in God and seek
God. Third, Christian friendship is transformed by grace. Fourth, it does not end with the
Kingdom, but there reaches its perfection when everyone has perfect friendship with
God.”

Love is a perspective or an angle used in our study of chastity for it is relevant and
significant to the latter as a Christian virtue since “Christianity is foremost a religion of
love.” By considering the importance of the human dimension, it hopes to capture the
essence of the vow which lies in one’s loving relationship, friendship, and intimacy with
the self, others, God, and creation. “The spiritual dimension, the loving relationship with
God in prayer, meditation, and discernment, is of central importance but it must not
become a substitute for the human dimension, as often happened in the past.” It is
worthwhile to note that chastity is more comprehensible in the perspective of love since
the former articulates the archetypal human needs for intimacy, a reciprocation of love in

85 Ibid. 97.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid. 132.
total self-giving, and the movement towards sexual integration and wholeness. Love is central in one’s affective growth and maturity.

Many are the roads of friendship. Sometimes the beginning is physical attraction from which we have to be gradually freed. An apparently causal encounter may kindle an immense fire in the heart, hard to put out. But why should it be put out when it can be led gently beyond the zone of sensibility to burn in the depths of the person, there where it can be united to the love of God? Fire will always be fire, but at that level it will burn freely and expand still more, its only limit being the depths of the human heart that can love with all strength of a God-given love.

To reach this point we have to fight quietly and tenaciously to free ourselves from the pull of the sensual and carnal. Need for bodily contact may become so violent at times that it leads to actions that are frankly wrong. This can come about between persons of the same or different sexes. But should this happen all is not lost. The important thing is to keep the will fixed on our goal: a love of friendship that, far from taking from the love that we owe to God, becomes one with it. This can only be where there is unshakeable determination to pierce through the bodily and sensual to reach true love in perfect chastity. I don’t want to sound Gnostic here, because I am fully aware that chastity is bodily and sensual but also ordered.

“Spirituality in the past with its over emphasis on the ‘spirit’ and the rejection of what is physically human succeeded in making consecrated celibates reject their body and eventually hate themselves.”88 True, experience is the best educator. We have to learn from the past by trying to minimize if not totally eradicate those, which impede our

88 Philomena Agudo, I Chose You, pp. 115-116
growth. To aim at wholeness and integration demands an acknowledgement and an appreciation of our humanness.

Some scholars would argue that a lot of problems and dangers in the development of a friendship come from the fact that men and women have so little idea of each other’s psychology. We have to know how a man loves. How for him love is an intense concentration, whereas, for a woman it means total immersion and slow diffusion. Even the wholly spiritual love of a religious woman for a man takes possession of her entire being. She may be absorbed in this way, yet wholly free from anything sensual or contrary to chastity. Through ignorance of the reactions of the other sex we can become a danger for each other. Sometimes it happens that persons who want to remain perfectly pure and faithful are afraid to set out on the road of friendship for fear of impunity. The danger is not imaginary; but when we are spiritually certain that a real friendship is offered us by the Lord, we should set our eyes on the aim and pass courageously through all imaginings that could stand in our way. What counts is the determination to follow the path of chastity. Passions and desires may deafen us, but they cannot make us deviate if our eyes are on the Lord and if we have a guide to whom we can entrust ourselves. In a good number of cases, the advice of another friend or spiritual director will be necessary, since they will be able to judge this intimacy more objectively.

The love of friendship creates a relationship of closeness and intimacy, which unites those who are friends in a total community of feelings and affections. Friendship is a stimulating affair, bringing out the best in each of the friends. You use a mirror to see your face. You use friend to see your soul. Friendship is a union of one mind with
another. Men become like those they associate with. It goes further to build up between those who love each other a total intimacy and shared inwardness, the ideal of which remains man’s union with God. Neither friendship nor love tends towards a disembodied relationship, which would end up by disregarding the fact that we are men and women. When St. Paul said: “There is neither male nor female” (Gal. 3:28), what he meant was that the redemption is offered in exactly the same way to all human beings. But we each receive the redemption with resonances of our own personality. Virginity is a sign in this world of our future condition, where there will be no taking of husband and wife. Yet it is impossible to imagine such relationships that would have nothing to do with our man-woman condition. Moreover, the attraction of the two sexes for each is so deeply ingrained in our flesh and irrational instincts that can lead to a falsification of human relationships. As Paul understands it, this kind of attraction tends to snatch the relationship from the Spirit.

Exclusive special friendships may arise which will divide a community; there is also the danger of homosexuality. Between persons of different sexes almost anything can happen, from love-seeking disguised under pretence of spiritual help or communion in the love of God, to habitual faults that are totally contrary to chastity. To avoid all this we have to be complete masters of our desires and passions and be led by the law of the spirit. Now, no one can live without love; yet it is possible to love without awakening the sexual instincts. Chastity intervenes here to restrain the affective powers and force them towards the deeper levels of the personality. It teaches us to express ourselves in

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unambiguous words and gestures that reveal depths of attraction without ever allowing them to be overloaded by sensuality.

How do we think Jesus loved? We know he loved his apostles and particularly St. John and the gospel tells us he loved Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Although it was the love of God lived in human life it was none the less a human love, a perfect love of friendship. Christ loved deeply and chastely. It is difficult for us to understand how we can love with all our heart and feel the strength of love invade our whole being, yet remain totally free from inordinate sensual love. A mother’s love is absolute; she is possessed by it entirely and it is a chaste love. The love of a man for his wife can also express his whole self and move him to the last fiber of his flesh, and yet in total chastity. So celibates need not imagine some kind of living of a love outside the flesh, but in such a way that the flesh does not seduce the spirit. Our sensibility is chaste when it becomes nothing but a sign and the dwelling-place of the Spirit.

**Conclusion**

It is undeniable that consecrated celibates who are called to be prophetic witnesses and signs of contemplative presence in the world need to develop a healthy friendship. Friendship and intimacy are very important factors to personal, sexual, spousal / celibate, growth and fulfillment. The capacity for spiritual closeness / intimacy is linked with the capacity to love. To find fulfillment in the consecrated celibate life, one must grow in spiritual intimacy with a significant other, as well as in God. When the individual is incapable of spiritual intimacy, he/she compensates by indulging in genital gratification.\(^90\) “Friendship deepens the capacity to love and enhances spiritual life.

\(^90\) Philomina Agudo, *I chose You*, pp. 122-123.
Seeing God in faith, in the heart of a friend is the foundation of spiritual intimacy in friendship. Emotional maturity however, is an indispensable element in spiritual intimacy.”

A well-known author, Diarmuid O’Murchu, supports the idea of the celibates’ need for friendship and intimacy since these two are fundamentally human emotional needs.

Consecrated celibacy assumes a new ambience in our time, namely, the redemption of life-giving intimacy. This involves a growth in acceptance, warmth, closeness, and empathy with both God and people. For a luminal witness, celibacy out of tune with the human capacity for intimacy loses credibility. It must remain close to the longings of the human heart and articulate these in a manner that awakens and fulfills people’s deepest desires.

Celibate intimacy with another or with others represents personal relationship of trust and loyalty that generates the kind of caring commitment characteristic of friendship. This kind of caring attitude involves self-awareness, self-disclosure, self-entrustment, and self-donation.

In this final section I will discuss ways to think about living chaste friendships. Asceticism and discipline are very important in order to live a chaste and consecrated love by overcoming all forms of egoistic tendencies and subjective values. There is a necessity to strengthen our will and to integrate the different levels of our psychic life in the service of the will to love. This is to align our values to the values and spirit of Jesus Christ. Renunciation of one value is essential in order to grow into a higher one. Self-

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91 Ibid.

92 Diarmuid O’Murchu. *Poverty, Celibacy, and Obedience*, ibid. 132.
transcendence can allow us to find Him whom our hearts seek in all situations. In *Vita Consecrata*, Pope Paul VI spoke of “the asceticism needed for maturation of the personality”. The religious asceticism is more demanding. It consists in the deliberate and assiduous practice of those virtues needed in living out promise and vows to God. Self-denial in the highest degree is an essential condition if one is to follow Christ.\(^{93}\) 

“Asceticism by helping to master and correct the inclinations of human nature wounded by sin, is truly indispensable if consecrated persons are to maintain faithful to their own vocation and follow Jesus on the way of the cross.”\(^ {94}\)

Prayer and Meditation are great means of growth in celibate friendship. “Prayer is the best weapon we can have against all sorts of temptations that beset us. In practice this involves great fidelity to liturgical and personal prayer, to periods devoted to mental prayer and contemplation, to Eucharistic adoration, to monthly retreats and to spiritual exercises.”\(^ {95}\) It is the lifeblood of our ministry and apostolate and a means of deepening one’s friendship with God. The Gospels are the best source of our meditation and prayer. Our capacity to relate to the self and to others also determines the quality of our relationship with God. Prayer is a communication, which brings about a corresponding quality of relationship. So the quality of our relationship mirrors the quality of our prayer life.\(^ {96}\) Friendship and intimacy are extensions of our contemplative prayer. As mystical

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\(^{93}\) Joyce Ridick, Treasures in Earthen Vessels: The Vows, ibid. p. 69.

\(^{94}\) *Vita Consecrata*, 38.

\(^{95}\) Ibid.

contemplation leads to human authenticity so does mystical friendship; as mystical contemplation leads to self-transcendence so does mystical friendship.\textsuperscript{97}

Solitude and loneliness are indispensable elements in order to find oneself, integrate those aspects and levels of self which are troublesome, and have an identity, a personal identity in Christ which can be offered as gifts to others. Desert experiences lead a person into contact with the basic essential needs, values, attitudes of the self; they help confront a person with love and give time to work through a proper integration. We need the silence of solitude to be with our Spouse, to find the hurts and fears, the uncertainty and pain, as well as the joy and peace, desire and gratitude.\textsuperscript{98} It is at the same time very therapeutic and a challenge to firmly and courageously face ourselves. Solitude is the context and opportunity to assimilate and integrate what God is saying to me in both my prayer life and in my interaction with others. It is the moment of holding together diverse experiences, with their possibilities and contradictions, while awaiting the birth of new insight, new intuition, new challenge, and a new sense of being called forth in the service of the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{99} Further, solitude and loneliness allow the religious to give space and time to “come home to oneself, to tune in to the God within, the source of our living water welling up in the heart.”\textsuperscript{100}


\textsuperscript{98} Joyce Ridick, Treasures in Earthen Vessels: The Vows, ibid., p. 71


\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
Any intimate physical expression and interaction must be renounced in celibate chastity, whether that is holding hands, kissing or caressing. Such interaction between man-woman, woman-woman or man-man, on an intimate plane, has sexual connotations, no matter what rationalizations are offered, or in what close situations one finds himself or herself. Reasons such as helping to overcome inhibitions, learning to trust, I need you, I need to relax, gratitude, sympathy, etc. are rationalizations since all these needs can be satisfied in another way, with means which are in keeping with the life-time promise one has made.

Self-actualization is not our goal but self-transcendence. Such action uses the other as object, not as person. It is to deny, remove from others the third human level and the level of grace which should be most operative in one’s specific vocation. The same can be said of actions which involve the senses such as the eyes: looks of lust, prolonged looks of intensity, depths, seductiveness, searching, penetrating. The unconscious message of sexual desire is clear if both are honest enough to recognize it.

A good concrete criterion for evaluation can be: whatever act I engage in with the other in secret, would I be comfortable doing the same thing with him/her in the community room or refectory or in my community? Would it be objectively acceptable as such? The ultimate criterion is the degree of honest self-transcendent love of God that I am willing to live.

A genuine friendship is immersed in God. God remains the first concern of each party in the friendship. He is their chief love. They would do nothing, absolutely nothing to displease or divide their hearts. This implies that each person is a man or woman of deep
prayer. Religious and priests who do not really understand their vocation and love it deeply are hardly capable of celibate friendship.

A growing commitment to the celibate gift; God is a God of fidelity and He expects fidelity from us. A beautiful friendship strengthens and perfects chastity. It prompts each party to want the celibate dedication more strongly and to be entirely faithful to it. It facilitates emotional and spiritual growth. An authentic celibate is the person who knows how to make love in the fullest spiritual sense of the term. The truly celibate person is the one who is a maker of love, even if she or he had never had a genital experience. Making love involves sharing myself with another in ways that are reciprocated. On the personal and sexual levels, the celibate is pledged to a non-exclusive, non-genital commitment of care. Spiritual intimacy is a relationship of loving closeness and personal familiarity with God that is expressed in compassion for others. At its core, it is love-making (God in us) and making-love (compassion for the world).

As a sexual person, the fact that I am naturally attracted to some others reveal the natural attraction of the Persons of the Trinity for each other, to find one’s ‘I AM’ in the embrace of the other ‘Thou’. Spiritual and sexual lives interact and mature together. I can truly be an image of God, who is love, if I am able to experience and dwell in love. What makes me spiritual as a celibate is that I do not spiritualize my relationships in the sense of ignoring the reality that I am a sexual person. Rather, I am able to be intimate as a celibate precisely because I have discovered non-manipulative ways of being personally and sexually intimate with others. This is what makes me celibate and spiritual. It is the meeting point of celibacy and spirituality in a sexually-embodied person. Spirituality is what enables me as a celibate to make love in a non-genital way. Like Jesus, “His way of
loving and of relating is the only authentic way to be spiritual and celibate.\textsuperscript{101} Spiritual intimacy is based on love, esteem, and respect for the other. A spiritual bond is established to make the relationship a source of comfort and support. There is a sincere respect for each other.\textsuperscript{102}

It is true that universal love of the celibate does not mean that she/he does not love the individual persons. A deep friendship with one individual does not erase celibate universality. Genuine friendship promotes universal warmth. Each party finds that he/she goes out more warmly to all people.

Authentic celibate friendship limits the frequency and length of visits. Thomas Dubay gives a sound advice, “A man or woman or of prayer instinctively knows what is too much in the area of time spent together and what is too much in the area of signs of affection. Celibates who are too demonstrative in their affection and who spend too much time together soon have chastity problems”.\textsuperscript{103} Healthy friendship among celibates is non-genital. When celibate friendship deteriorates into genital behavior, the results are loss of self-esteem and guilt. It also indicates the lack of respect for each other’s commitment and integrity. There is mutual appreciation and respect for each other’s integrity. True friends appreciate and affirm each other. They also value the integrity and

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 157 – 158.

\textsuperscript{102} Philomina Agudo, \textit{I chose You}, p. 122.

the reputation of the other. Each one does not take advantage or exploit his/her friend’s weak points.104

To be in love can be a temporary marvelous experience. The problem is not the feeling but the giving in; just as a person does not become a sinner when tempted but when she/he succumbs / gives in to it. It must be noted that physical conjugality can be avoided but one can still be profoundly psychologically conjoined and this can be a start of the betrayal of one’s celibate chastity. The heart of the consecrated must remain available to all and must therefore avoid any kind of love that is too binding, too exclusive, and risk becoming an impediment to the universal mission of the consecrated person and to his/her availability for the Kingdom.

Those celibates who know they are in a state of falling in love should try not to meet the other all alone especially in the hidden or dark place. It will be too difficult to speak only about pastoral activities or ministry. If it is necessary to meet, it might be helpful to do so in public, like in the community living room. Talk about the problem with your spiritual director, confessor, superior or best friend on whom you can rely and ask for help. Be open about how you feel about the relationship to your friend, and together seek professional help if need be. Don’t keep it to yourself. You need to relieve your own feelings, relax and share your inner tensions with somebody. Keep calm. Try to be patient with yourself. The affective life’s storms need time to calm down. Don’t rush to take decision. Ask for advice. Avoid frequent contacts with the person such as calls, visits and

104 Philomena Agudo, I chose You, ibid., p. 124.
letters. Avoid too affective expressions. Learn to smile and laugh at yourself when your heart sometimes flutters faster.  

In short, the vow of chastity excludes sensible affectivity, which could lead to marriage. We need affective friendships too, warm, delicate and deep. But we need to integrate them and order them hierarchically in the levels of our being. Without prudence and self-control, freedom in loving is impossible.

All I have said so far will be best understood if we scrutinize this kind of friendship a little more closely. Friendship is an attitude that unites two persons of the same or different sex in mutual feelings of admiration, respect, affection and deep tenderness. Its development follows in the wake of a growing intimate knowledge, and the continuous, quiet sharing of all the two friends have and are. Although the affective element is already very strong, it is not the dominating factor. Friendship and the love of friendship do not develop in the sexual zone that ends in bodily embraces. Yet it is always this same impulse that carries beings towards each other so that they live in and by one another. The love of friendship is free from those corporal manifestations that tend more immediately to the multiform expressions of the conjugal relationship. From the outset, friendship and love of friendship are free from the sensible, and this freedom is already a flowering of chastity.

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\[\textit{John Thadathil, Handouts on Evangelical Counsels and Consecrated Life, ibid., 123-124.}\]
conjugal relationship. From the outset, friendship and love of friendship are free from the sensible, and this freedom is already a flowering of chastity. It is this freedom that makes me able to relate with different people especially here at UD where I am very far from my own country, family, community of the Sisters, the Catholic Community and the Shona people in Zimbabwe.

In this spiritual friendship the end does not wholly justify the means. Some people make use of touches and loving caresses because they say these are the way to reach the soul of the person loved. But the road to conjugal love may prove an obstacle in this particular relationship. They then defend themselves by saying it is the first stage in the exploration of spiritual affection. In certain cases this may be true, but it is difficult to justify in those who have vowed their chastity to God. In such a vocation, presence supposes a distance and intimacy requires separation. A friendship of this kind can be true love, as real and strong as that of husband and wife who are extremely close to each other. And yet it is a totally liberated love that develops as much in absence and separation and become a wonderful occasion for its complete expansion.

In the friendship of which I speak, the two are present to each other in so great an intimacy that it is a total shared inwardness. Each one rests in the other in such a peace and certainty that this union is transparent and wholly chaste. From the outset such friends may enjoy an intimacy that married people only reach after long years of purification. Conjugal love is not the only love that tends to such union, for the very essence of perfect friendship is already the deep desire of intimate oneness that makes us want to live in the other and the other in us. Every act of loving is a mysterious presence by which the loved one becomes for the lover an intimate pole of affection and life.
Indeed, the mystery of conjugal/union can receive great light from this experience of friendship. While in its early stages its path differs from that of chastity and celibacy, the two ways end by meeting, for true love is chaste.

If our heart is so captivated that we cannot think of the person loved without finding his absence unbearable, then it becomes difficult to love God with total love. But such an attraction is not necessarily an obstacle to this love. In fact, it may even help to clarify our option for God and make it more definitive. It can happen too, that our will wavers and our heart is divided. We may still be bound by what St. Paul calls the flesh that is in us fighting against the spirit. Once again we have to make a distinction between connivance with the flesh and what are commonly known as temptations. Perfect chastity, therefore, can quite well be present at the same time as the most severe temptations. By concentrating on the ideal friendship, there will be a gradual purification of heart and spirit. And experience goes to show that our capacities for love expand in proportion to our freedom from sensual and selfish attachments. In this way people consecrated to God may one day find out that their growing friendship is nothing but an immense love. This can be perfectly chaste though so intensely felt. This is a love that is knowledge, openness, transparent, reciprocal respect and deep attention, limitless affection, and a presence so inward that each one lives in the other in what he is in the depths of his own being. So close a union each one recognizes as God’s gift and not man’s creation. Each receives the other from God’s hands who unites them together in Him; the love Christ spoke of when he wished us to be “one as he is one with the Father’ (Jn. 17:21).
No one should attempt this experience on his own initiative. Good friendships, we can all try to develop, but being consecrated to God we have to travel this road with eyes fixed on Him. He alone can give us those with whom we can share such extraordinary friendships. These are special gifts of God and have to be received as such. Every human being has to love, and those whose hearts are vowed to God must and should love as anyone. Everyone needs friends to share what touches them most closely. These are friendships that can carry them far towards the discovery of God. They will travel the road to God with a wide-open heart, full of the joy of loving and being loved. True friendship leads to absoluteness of love; and when this quality is reached, and then God’s absolute love reveals itself.

At this point it is still possible to find illusions in friendship and love; for fleshly desires are never totally absent, and they can awaken even in this love. But a woman vowed in chastity to God, knowing herself to be loved to such an extent, need have no fear. This is a love which unites without being bound and is all transparent with the spirit. So absolute a love may seem folly, but it is a folly that is pure wisdom of a love lived in a human life as to the love of God. Its madness is to be absolutely pure and at the same time wholly incarnate: a folly so great, so holy, so true, so final and absolute, that it can only flower in the sunlight of God.

In a very real sense the face of the friend becomes the revelation of the divine glance. God shows himself in this way in the heart and life of a man with as much evidence as in the highest contemplation. It is one of the finest fruits of celibacy when the presence of the friend becomes the presence of God. And still we have to remain prudent; for the one who disguise himself as an angel of light may bring us to think that the flesh has no more
dangers for us. In the end, we have to say as we did at the beginning, that by awakening in us extra-ordinary powers of loving, this way of friendship can also arouse our lower instincts. So we have to be alert to see that our friendship develops in total chastity.
CONCLUSION

The central thesis of this paper is that intimate friendship is possible between men and women religious who took the vow of chastity. In celibacy, friendships can develop that are not concessions to human weakness but true ways to the Lord. God is there in them as the mysterious third person, always present but ever discreet, so that it is a really human love with which the friends love each other. Human and concrete as it may be, it is a love all transfigured in the divine light. It finds its growth in God; and it is God, beneath a human face who stands revealed. Then the two friends discover a new depth in their love. They look at each other with an open gaze that reaches the very core of the heart and spirit. But it is no longer each other they are looking at now but, intimately united, they look towards the Lord. Peacefully their love is directed to its source. From them all is pure light. Their love lived in perfect chastity reveals itself as an intimate union with God. When two beings love each other like this in God in perfect chastity, he can make them reach such intimate union that it is a true image of his love. Having renounced conjugal lave, they will not be excluded from revealing the mystery of divine life and divine love in their lives as they rediscover them in friendship. In the mutual discovery of their life they grasp, beyond the difference of sex and the distinction of persons, the unique current of life that springs from God.
So it is that marvelous grace, the primordial unity of the human couple is restored in chastity and virginity. I know that this is a mystery; only those who have experienced it can begin to understand. But this experience will be the more readily admitted if we realize how by this union, two beings whose whole love is given to God are, in fact brought back to the first union of creation by God’s spirit. It is in him that these persons love each other and are united; in him they find each other; and their friendship, as it manifests their deep love, reveals this “third one” who is God himself. That this love is a mystical experience is undeniable, but the mystic is, ultimately, the only one who has reached the full stature of man. If they are so chastely united the one with the other, it is because they are attached to God in a total solitude that is a pure act of virginity. Each one is alone now before this God who gives them their being, leads them to His love and calls them by their name in the complete freedom for their gift to one another, God unites in a “marriage” of chastity and friendship, “Love without a name!” Love that image of His own life in the Trinity.
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