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## THE SACRIFICIAL VALUE OF VIRGINITY<sup>1</sup>

When Achimelek the priest of Nob offered the shewbread of his sanctuary to David and his hungry companions, he made one condition: the men, he told David, should 'have kept themselves from women.' 'Indeed,' replied David to the priest, 'women have been kept away from us, as always when I take the field: the bodies of my men are holy. This may be a profane journey; yet today they are holy in their bodies.'<sup>2</sup> Upon which assurance, Achimelek distributed the 'holy bread' (1 Sam. 21:4-6).

This episode gives two cases in which temporary continence was required in the Old Testament: before eating sacred food,<sup>3</sup> and when engaged in a military expedition.<sup>4</sup> The text shows also that the purpose of this practice was to confer physical 'holiness' on those who observed it.

Similarly, in his defence of virginity in 1 Cor. 7, St Paul says that the aim of the virgin is 'to be holy both in body and in spirit' (v. 34). For Paul also, continence is connected with 'holiness': the parallelism with the Old Testament concept is obvious.

<sup>1</sup> This article continues a study of the biblical doctrine of celibacy of which three parts have already appeared in *Scripture* 1960, pp. 97-105; 1961, pp. 12-20; 1962, pp. 1-12.

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew text of the second part of David's reply is not clear. We follow here the translation proposed by R. de Vaux, *Les Livres de Samuel (Bible de Jérusalem)*, Paris 1953, p. 102. Though it makes clumsy English, we translate the Hebrew *qādōsh* by 'holy,' 'Clean' or 'pure' would be more idiomatic (cf. Knox version) but would miss the point. The Hebrew word for 'body' is *keli*: thing, utensil, body. Here it may be a euphemism as 'parts' in English.

<sup>3</sup> At least it must have been so at the time of David. The later legislation of Lev. 22:2-7 does not include normal marital relations among the impediments which bar the Israelite from a sacred meal.

<sup>4</sup> This law also explains the behaviour of Urias, refusing to enter his house and see his wife when he was summoned by David to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 11:8-13). At Qumran continence is expected of those who will take part in the apocalyptic 'War of the Children of Light against the Children of Darkness': 'No toddling child or woman is to enter their camp from the moment they leave Jerusalem to go to war until they return' (7:7). If celibacy was kept at least in some sections of the Essene sect, one of its reasons might have been the consciousness that, by entering the Community, they had joined the camp of God; they were on a war footing and, for them, the eschatological war had already started.

## THE SACRIFICIAL VALUE OF VIRGINITY

What is that 'sanctity' which St Paul and the old Law saw in continence? The term 'holiness' has in the Bible a very extensive comprehension. How are we to understand the 'holiness' that gives a distinct value to continence and virginity?

### I CONTINENCE AND CULT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Another case of temporary continence in the Old Testament is to be found in Ex. 19:14-15 where the Israelites, at the foot of Mt Sinai, are requested to 'sanctify themselves' by three days of continence before the ratification of the Covenant and the promulgation of the Law.

The explanation that comes spontaneously to the mind is that it was a matter of ritual cleanness. Marital relations would entail a defilement and had therefore to be omitted before celebrating the rites of the Covenant or receiving sacred food. The same explanation would account also for continence in time of war. The Israelites considered military campaigns as a kind of liturgy. Wars were sacred; they were, as the old Hebrew poem has it, 'the wars of Yahweh' (Num. 21:14; cf. 1 Sam. 18:17; 25:28). Yahweh encamped with his troops (Jg. 4:14; 2 Sam. 5:24). Hence the whole camp was 'holy' (Deut. 23:10-15), transformed into a sanctuary by the presence of the Ark (cf. Num. 10:35-6; 1 Sam. 4) and warriors were the 'sanctified of Yahweh' (Is. 13:3; cf. Jer. 22:7; 51:27-8).<sup>1</sup> This ritual background of war is obviously the reason for the temporary continence observed by David and his companions: it had the same significance as that of the Israelites standing at the foot of Sinai. The cult put the people in the divine presence or in contact with objects dedicated to God and, for that, ritual cleanness had to be observed.

Because it stresses the cultic significance of continence, this explanation contains an important element of truth. But is it correct to put the matter in terms of 'cleanness'? It should be noticed that in the Bible the use of marriage does not seem to be considered as a cause of defilement.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the texts under consideration do not describe continence as clean (in Hebrew, *ṭāhōr*) but as holy (*qādōsh*); the opposite condition is profane (*ḥol*): not unclean (*ṭāmē*): there is no 'profane' bread, says Achimelek, but only the 'holy' shewbread; so the men must be 'holy' and David has to certify that, though the

<sup>1</sup> cf. R. de Vaux, *Les Institutions de l'Ancien Testament* II, Paris 1960, p. 74; J. Pedersen, *Israel, its Life and Culture* III-IV, London 1940, pp. 12-15

<sup>2</sup> Defilement was caused not by the use of marriage but by certain sexual phenomena which evoked a loss of physical integrity as leprosy or gonorrhoea with which they were listed (Lev. 22:4-8).

circumstances of the journey may be 'profane,' his men are indeed 'holy.'

There is a great difference between cleanness and—even physical—holiness.<sup>1</sup> Cleanness was essentially a negative notion : it consisted in the absence or in the removal of any cause of defilement.<sup>2</sup> Holiness, on the contrary, had a positive value. Coming from a root which contained probably the idea of separation, the word *qâdôsh*, particularly when, as in I Sam. 21:4-6, it was used in opposition to *hol*, meant 'that which differed' from the familiar course of things; that which, taken above the level of profane existence, shared in the awesome aloofness of the divine majesty. Holiness was a kind of metaphysical radiance that made the reality which was impregnated with it at the same time fascinating and dangerous.<sup>3</sup> For the Hebrews, it was strictly speaking a divine attribute and even 'so to say the very essence of the divinity.'<sup>4</sup> Sanctification was therefore a kind of assumption into the divine sphere.

It was the purpose of the cult to bring about that 'sanctification.' The cult was the activity by which man put himself in the divine presence, expecting God to answer, to come and meet him, as He had met Israel on the occasion of the great events which the cult commemorated. This cultic contact with God impregnated with divine 'holiness' the things and the people who took part in the liturgy. Set apart from profane existence, they were impregnated with divine radiation and raised up into the sphere of the divine Glory. Thus they acquired, at least for a time, a special quality which made them unfit for profane life. Such was especially the case of the ministers of the cult. 'Sanctified' by the divine contact, they were set apart; they had to keep aloof from the routine of daily life and this aloofness was the mark left upon them by their contact with the holiness of God. Like Moses on Mt Sinai, away from the

<sup>1</sup> In spite of the fact that, by a process of contamination, on account of the practical similarities between the two notions, the words are sometimes interchanged : cf. Jos. 7:13; 2 Sam. 11:4; Job 1:5; Deut. 22:9; Ez. 23:38, 39.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Semitic mentality, it is the unclean which has a positive meaning : uncleanness is a quality which similarly affects the object as does holiness. In the two antitheses holy-profane and clean-unclean, it is the terms holy and unclean which are positive, profane and clean being merely the negation of the quality implied in the opposite term. 'Dans la mentalité ancienne, l'impur et le sacré sont des notions connexes. Ils contiennent l'un et l'autre une force mystérieuse et effrayante, qui agit par contact et qui met en état d'interdit . . . Ces conceptions primitives se retrouvent dans l'Ancien Testament : on ne peut pas toucher l'Arche d'alliance et on ne peut pas toucher un cadavre ; la mère doit se purifier après l'accouchement, qui l'a rendue impure, et le prêtre doit changer ses vêtements après le sacrifice, qui l'a rendu sacré' (R. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 353). On the distinction between the notion of holiness and that of purity, cf. O. Procksch in *TWNT I*, p. 88 and P. van Imschoot, *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament II*, Paris-Tournai 1956, pp. 204-5.

<sup>3</sup> cf. R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Oxford 1923

<sup>4</sup> P. van Imschoot, op. cit., I, 1954, p. 42

routines of daily life, they communed with the divine Glory on the religious summits to which the 'Most High' had taken them.

Continence was part of that process of 'sanctification.' As the Levite was, at least theoretically, exempted from tilling the land so as to be entirely at the service of God (Jos. 13:14, 33; 14:3-4; 18:7), the Israelite engaging in the performance of the cult had to leave the profane world behind and even the profane duty of procreation, so as to stand in attendance before Yahweh and commune in the sacred atmosphere surrounding the deity.

The temporary continence of the Old Testament was therefore a case, not exactly of ritual cleanliness, but of cultic consecration. Its aim was not to remove a stain but to manifest the intensity of man's dedication to God's affairs and the assumption of his life into a higher sphere. It signified that man had left his earthly abode to be transferred into the divine presence. Thus in Jl. 2:16, the prophet invites the 'bridegroom to go forth from his bed and the bride out of her bride chamber' in order to attend a ceremony of lamentation on the occasion of a national calamity. The context shows clearly the meaning of that invitation to continence: it is not that there would be anything unseemly about conjugal relations in such sad circumstances; nor is it supposed that continence would be a praiseworthy act of mortification that might help to placate God. The intention is rather, as the Hebrew text has it, to 'sanctify' an assembly: the people must go and meet God in the Temple. Hence for the time being, they have to leave their profane occupations and enter the divine presence. Fasting also is part of that process by which existence is loosed from its profane moorings and given a sacral value (cf. 2:15 and 1:14: 'sanctify a fast'). Continence has the same meaning.

Other cases of cultic continence betray the same purpose. According to the Mishna, 'the High Priest was taken away from home and placed in the council room' seven days before the celebration of the Day of Atonement.<sup>1</sup> The Mishnaic treatise explains the rule in terms of ritual cleanliness: 'for fear that "an accident" might happen, rendering him unfit for his functions,' but the original intention must have been deeper: the priest had to be 'away from home,' that is free from profane commitments, and be entirely concerned with his sacred business. The seven days of isolation before the feast were meant to prepare him for that consecration: it was a 'holy' time, a time devoted to God. So also was the time of the priestly ordination, on the occasion of which, during seven days, Aaron and his sons—and presumably later on the clergy of Jerusalem—had to stay 'day and

<sup>1</sup> *Yoma* 1, 1; quoted in J. Bonsirven, *Textes Rabbiniques des Deux Premiers Siècles Chrétiens* . . ., Rome 1955, no. 880, p. 218

night at the entrance of the sanctuary' (Lev. 8:33). Evidently this entailed continence but it is noteworthy that continence is not explicitly mentioned in that text. It has no special interest in itself. The point is that the new priest must, so to say, offer to God the first-fruits of his priestly existence by staying in the sanctuary, entirely given to his cultic meeting with God.<sup>1</sup> Continence is only an implicit aspect of that dedication.

It is for the same cultic reason that, according to a school of rabbis,<sup>2</sup> marital relations were forbidden on sabbath day : sabbath was sacred time. The work of procreation was as profane as any other work ; it was included among those activities, good indeed and blessed by God, yet profane, by which man was to 'fill the earth and subdue it' (Gen. 1:28). On the seventh day, such activities had to be interrupted so as to draw near to God through the cult, and share in the divine rest.

According to the commentary of Rabbi Nathan on the *Pirqê Aboth*, the sabbath evoked the Day of the Messias, 'the day that will be entirely sabbath, when there is no eating nor drinking, buying nor selling ; but the just will remain sitting with their crowns on their head and will enjoy the splendour of the Shekinah.'<sup>3</sup> If Rabbi Nathan had added 'begetting' to the list of the works which are not done during the eternal Rest and its ritual anticipation on sabbath day,<sup>4</sup> he would have given the exact meaning of cultic continence : profane life is suspended while the just take their rest, entranced and fascinated by the divine radiance shining through the cult. In that rapture, they might say with the Psalmist :

Whom else have I in heaven but You ?  
and when I am with You, the earth delights me not.  
My flesh and my heart are spent,  
God is my portion forever . . .  
For me, my joy is to be with God. (Ps. 73:25-8)

Commentators consider this text to be one of the highest expressions of love for God in the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup> The pious Israelite would

<sup>1</sup> Quoting Lev. 8:33 as an anticipation of Christian priestly celibacy, the Encyclical *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii* of Pius XI observes that the Roman religion also knew the principle *ad deos adeunto caste*. The encyclical quotes also the interesting commentary of Cicero on that principle (*De Legibus*, II, 8).

<sup>2</sup> cf. J. Bonsirven, op. cit., no 1256, p. 232 (*Ketuboth*, *Talmud Babli*, 65b)

<sup>3</sup> *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan* I. cf. Strack-Billerbeck I, p. 890

<sup>4</sup> This description of the just with a crown on their head, sitting in the light of the Shekinah, was a *cliché* of Rabbinical literature. See texts in Strack-Billerbeck, *ibid*. Used to describe the life of the world to come, it included 'begetting and procreating' among the things that would not be done any more in that age. Applying the theme to the sabbath, R. Nathan omitted these words, possibly because he did not belong to the school that forbade conjugal relations on the sabbath day.

<sup>5</sup> cf. E. Podechard, *Le Psautier, Traduction Littérale et Explication Historique* I, Lyon 1949, p. 319

recognise in it also the best explanation of his 'sanctification' through the cult, and of the continence this sanctification entailed at those times: there is no thought even for the earthly joys and duties of marriage when, in the cult, flesh and heart are consumed by the terrifying joy of facing the dazzling presence of the divine 'Shekinah.'

## II VIRGINITY AND THE CULT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The days of the Messias have come. With the advent of Christ the divine presence is no longer hidden behind the veils of cultic symbols: it abides with us and the Glory of the 'Shekinah' shines in the flesh of the Incarnate Word (Jn. 1:14). The believer lives continuously in the radiance of that presence: his whole life may realise what the old cult had only prepared and typified.

As regards continence, the consequences of the new dispensation were already suggested in a midrashic text which said:

If on the day when God manifested himself on Mt Sinai to give the Law, he forbade marital intercourse for three days, will not the same be forbidden also in the age to come when the Shekinah will abide with them? <sup>1</sup>

The midrash was wrong in putting the matter in terms of a prohibition: marriage is not evil that it should be forbidden. It must rather fade away by itself when the conditions have changed. Virginity does not belong to the Law that compels but to the Spirit that prompts 'sweetly and firmly.' Yet in his clumsy way the midrashic author gives an interesting insight into the meaning of virginity. When the days of the Messias have come and the 'Shekinah' has been manifested in him, cultic continence can be fulfilled. Man can fully dedicate his life to the joy of living in the divine presence and, in that joy, forgo marriage and family. Virginity in the New Testament extends to the whole of human life the 'holiness' which the Old Testament saw already in temporary continence. It is in that sense that St Paul in 1 Cor. 7:34 described virginity as a condition of physical and spiritual 'holiness.'

The aim of the Christian celibate is to 'be holy both in body and in spirit.' It would be a complete misunderstanding of Paul's thought to give holiness in that text its modern meaning of moral perfection. This meaning should not be assumed too easily. Undoubtedly virginity, implying perfect self control, brings along with it all the other virtues. As St Jerome says, repeating a formula which ultimately goes

<sup>1</sup> *Midrash Ps.* 146 § 4. cf. Strack-Billerbeck I, p. 889. cf. Mk. 12:25

back to Socrates,<sup>1</sup> 'continencc is the strong foundation and the lofty pinnacle of all virtues : it supports and protects them all.'<sup>2</sup> But true as it may be, this moral view on virginity was not in Paul's mind when he exhorted the Corinthians to celibacy. In the writings of the Apostle as in the rest of the Bible, 'holiness' is not primarily a moral quality. *Hagios* in the Greek of the New Testament as *qâdôsh* in the Hebrew of the Old do not mean virtuous, good or pious but, as we saw, sacred. Its connotations are not basically ethical but religious. Moreover, in the context of 1 Cor. 7:34, the merely ethical meaning of the word is excluded by the sentence itself which speaks of physical and spiritual sanctity : moral sanctity cannot be physical.

The reference to 'bodily sanctity' shows the cultic background of St Paul's thought. Yet, still less than in the continence of the old cult should that physical holiness be reduced to mere cleanness. In the context of 1 Cor. 7, virginity is opposed to marriage but marriage for Paul is not unclean. When he wrote 1 Cor., he may not yet have had in mind the spirituality of matrimony he was to develop in Eph. 5:25-33. But he did not consider wedlock as unholy. Just before writing on virginity, when drawing the consequences of the principle that our bodies are the members of Christ, he does not conclude that it would be repugnant to imagine the limbs of Christ engaged in married life. Fornication only would be abhorrent in the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15-20). Matrimony does not defile. Only sin does.

Matrimony is not sinful. But it is 'profane.' It belongs to the 'things of this world,' to the fleeting realities of our present condition (1 Cor. 7:32-4). The opposition between virginity and matrimony is not that of purity and impurity. As in the Old Testament, they are contrasted as sacred and profane life. Virginity is 'holy,' that is sacred in the biblical sense of the term : it is *qâdôsh*, set apart and exalted. 'Dedicated'<sup>3</sup> or rather 'consecrated' would be the best rendering of the adjective *hagios* in 1 Cor. 7:34. By continence the virgin is made sacred, assumed into the sacred sphere of the divine Glory.

Like the temporary continence of the Old Testament, Christian celibacy has a cultic connotation. It does not aim at a physical or moral cleanness but at a consecration. But now, in the New Testament, this consecration covers the whole life of the faithful, for now, not only the Church (1 Cor. 3:17 ; Eph. 2:21) but even the body of every Christian is a Temple (1 Cor. 6:19 ; 2 Cor. 6:16) enclosing the 'Shekinah,' the divine presence. Christian life consists in a continuous

<sup>1</sup> As reported by Xenophon, *Mem.* 1, 5, 4. The formula was borrowed by Philo (*De Specialibus Legibus* IV, 101) and had some success among the Fathers of the Church. cf. P. T. Camelot, art. 'Egkrateia' in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Paris 1958, fasc. xxv, col. 357-70.

<sup>2</sup> *Adv. Jov.* 1, 38. P.L. 23, 264b

<sup>3</sup> It is the term chosen by the New English Version.

liturgy in which God's presence is recognised and glorified (1 Cor. 6:20). Perpetual continence is the logical consequence of that permanent spiritual liturgy. To a higher degree than the rites of the Old Law, this new liturgy raises man above ordinary life. It is given to some to spend their whole life in that 'better cult,' 'the perfect cult to the living God' (Heb. 9:14) which is part of the heavenly liturgy performed by the risen Christ: those are the virgins. With Christ, they 'have come not to the dark clouds of Sinai' but to the 'solemn feast' and to the radiance of the 'heavenly Jerusalem' (cf. Heb. 12:18-22). There the believer, with Christ, 'offers a cult pleasing to God with reverence and awe' (Heb. 12:28). Virginity is the most active form of participation in that heavenly liturgy.

And because, in the New Covenant, priest and victim are identified since the offering is now, in Christ, that of self, the holocaust which the virgins offer is 'the living holocaust of their bodies dedicated (*hagios*) to God' (Rom. 12:1). In that respect also, virginity belongs to the new cult and is holy. Not only as a minister but also as a victim, the virgin is consecrated and raised to the sphere of the divine.<sup>1</sup>

To understand this sacrificial consecration of virginity, it must be remembered that, in the biblical sacrifices and especially in the holocaust, the victim was destroyed, but the destruction was not an end in itself. It was 'a way to place the offering in God by transferring it into the field of the invisible.'<sup>2</sup> As appears from the Hebrew name of the holocaust (*olah*: elevation), the disappearance of the victim was only the reverse side of its exaltation: the sacrifice was a transfer and a transformation. When on a solemn occasion, a fire 'came from the Lord' (Lev. 9:24; 2 Chron. 7:1-3) and consumed the victim, it did not destroy the gift men had given but sanctified and divinised it.<sup>3</sup>

Thus does virginity 'sanctify.' The privation it entails is not the sign of a destruction but of an ascension. Like the holocaust, it is an 'elevation.' Through the holocaust of virginity, man's life is sanctified and divinised. Imbued with the radiance of the divine presence, burnt by the fire of divine charity, man sees his deepest urge and power turn

<sup>1</sup> Origen had already given the same explanation of 1 Cor. 7:34. '... "that she may be holy both in body and in spirit": the fact that he (Paul) uses the word "holy" has this reference that it is applied to people who are dedicated to God. Hence it is that the ram for instance which is dedicated to God is called holy and it is not allowed to shear it for profane use. A calf also, once dedicated to God, is called holy and it is not allowed to yoke it for profane work. We may understand from this what it is for a man to dedicate himself to God. If you devote yourself to God, you must imitate the beast (offered in sacrifice) which must no longer serve human purposes, nor do anything whatsoever concerning men and the present life. But all that concerns the soul and the observance of divine worship, that is what you must do and consider' (*Num. hom.* 24, 2; P.G. 12, 761b).

<sup>2</sup> R. de Vaux, *op. cit.*, p. 332

<sup>3</sup> C. X. Durwell, *The Resurrection*, London 1960, p. 62

into an act of love for God, as the victim was turned into smoke 'to ascend' into the divine Glory. Man's vital energy is sacrificed, that is, not cut off but consecrated and transfigured. In terms of modern psychology, it is sublimated. But whereas psychology, when speaking of sublimation, refers to an effort of self purification, the sublimation of Christian celibacy is of a theological order : it means assumption ; it denotes primarily the action of God accepting man's offering and lifting it up to Himself. This sublimation is the work of the divine love, consuming body and soul, apparently destroying but really assuming and transmuting their longings.

This transforming holocaust is nothing else than the individual application of the sacrificial exaltation of Christ. The epistle to the Hebrews makes of this exaltation one of its leading themes : as the High Priest of old entered the Holy of Holies with the blood of the victims, Christ, with the blood of his own sacrifice, entered the sanctuary of the divine presence where he sits forever at the right hand of God (Heb. 9:7-12 ; 10:12). Supremely efficacious, done 'once for all' (Heb. 7:27 ; 9:12 ; 10:10), that sacrifice is unique and its results last eternally. The significance of Christian virginity can be stated in the same terms. It is a sacrifice ; united with the sacrifice of Christ, it shares in its efficacy. Virginal life consists in a total surrender to the Godward thrust contained in Jesus' sacrifice, the thrust of the 'eternal spirit' (Heb. 9:13) and of generous love (Heb. 10:10). This thrust snatches man away from the world to take him to the divine presence. Hence virginity reaches God or rather God takes it to Himself ; following Christ, it enters heaven and sits at the right hand of God :

It dwells in heaven with the Father of Spirits, joining in the chorus and the dances of the heavenly Powers . . . : it gives man wings of desire to soar up to heaven ; it constitutes a bond of intimacy between man and God ; it is the intermediary that unites and brings together two beings, naturally so distant.<sup>1</sup>

There is more than Oriental grandiloquence in that description of virginity dancing in heaven along with the angels. It is a correct appraisal of the greatness of Christian celibacy. Whereas the continence of the Old Testament, in proportion to the cult with which it was connected, was imperfect, inefficacious and could only express the hope of a better 'sanctification,' hence had only a tentative character and had to be repeatedly but briefly performed, Christian celibacy has the perfection of the sacrifice of Christ of which it is a part. Like it, it is efficacious : on the part of man, it represents the absolutely radical surrender of the whole self to God ; on the part of God, it means total acceptance of that 'living holocaust' received in the presence of

<sup>1</sup> St Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate* 2, P.G. 46, 324

the divine Glory.<sup>1</sup> Hence, in proportion to the better cult to which it belongs, it has a decisive and lasting character: it is also done 'once for all' and never withdrawn.<sup>2</sup> Like Christ in heaven, it stands as a 'perfect cult to the living God' (Heb. 9:14), a liturgy in which God himself is the devouring fire (Heb. 12:29).

In a previous paper, it was shown that, with martyrdom, Christian celibacy is the most radical way of embodying the *nekrosis* of Christ, of sharing in his death.<sup>3</sup>

But the death of Jesus leads to the glory of his resurrection. It was a sacrifice, that is, beside the immolation, an exaltation and a consecration. In that respect also, Christian celibacy is assimilation to the death of Christ. The sacrifice of Jesus is reproduced in the celibate when his flesh and soul are not only immolated but also exalted, made sacred, holy.

'I sanctify myself,' Jesus said in the Sacerdotal Prayer (Jn. 17:19). By these words, he described his imminent death as a consecration which, while immolating his earthly existence, would lift him up to the full communion of the divine Holiness. Comparing this saying of Jesus with a similar phrase of the Hermetic literature, C. K. Barrett comments: 'Here (in the Hermetic text) apotheosis or something of the kind is in mind; and though apotheosis strictly understood is foreign to John's thought, the present passage looks in the same direction.'<sup>4</sup> Christian virginity too looks in the same direction. It is also a kind of apotheosis. As Christ 'sanctifies himself,' he 'sanctifies' also those who follow him, setting them apart from the world (17:15-16), taking them into the divine life (17:23), in the midst of the divine Glory (17:24), in the fire of the divine love (17:26). Celibacy is, like martyrdom, full participation in that 'sanctification.' It

<sup>1</sup> It is even an antecedent acceptance since it is the divine grace, the charisma which makes the self-surrender possible.

<sup>2</sup> Though Protestantism does not reject the idea of a dedicated celibacy, it does object in general to the vow of virginity. Such a pledge would amount to presumption, substituting man's self-reliance for the unpredictable ways of God's grace: 'it may be that some will live chastely outside marriage for a time, but in that we must not determine anything and take no assurance for the morrow' (Calvin, *Commentaires sur le Nouveau Testament*, Toulouse ed. 1894, III, p. 297; quoted by M. Thurian, *Mariage et Célibat*, Neuchâtel 1955, p. 109). But this objection overlooks the lasting character of God's grace: cf. M. Thurian, *ibid.* What gives virginity its perpetuity is God's acceptance of the sacrifice and not man's good will. Once He has accepted the sacrifice, God, who is faithful, does not withdraw His acceptance. It is by virtue of that antecedent divine acceptance and not on account of human earnestness that the sacrificial dedication is efficacious and irreversible. Ultimately the reliance of the virgin rests on the efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ: like it and in it, it is done 'once for all,' it is lasting and final.

<sup>3</sup> *Christian Celibacy and the Cross, Scripture XIV* (1962), pp. 1-12

<sup>4</sup> *The Gospel according to St John*, London 1955, p. 417

is a holy life because it is, in the full sense of the term, a sacrificial life. An immolation and an exaltation, it soars, in Christ, into the divine sphere.

In the words of M. Olier, the French divine of the seventeenth century, 'a chaste soul is a soul which is risen in spirit and shares in the very nature of the risen Christ . . . It has access with him to his perfect holiness and his divine qualities which change its deepest attitude and give it the very same longings and feelings which animate the Son of God in his risen condition.'<sup>1</sup>

This is exactly what St Paul meant when he described virginity as a 'holy' life. It is a life assumed in God, a life in which, as far as it can be done at present, the sacrificial consecration and apotheosis of Christ has been fulfilled.

L. LEGRAND

*St Peter's Seminary,  
Bangalore*

## THE EPIC OF JOSHUA

The Book of Joshua has its fair share of the problems associated with the Old Testament. There are the usual literary problems of its sources and its redaction; there is the connected question whether it should be considered the last book of a Hexateuch which begins with Genesis or whether it is to be placed in the Deuteronomic corpus. In the exegesis of the book itself we find two of the best known and most discussed (but not the most important) episodes of Israelite history—the collapse of the walls of Jericho in chapter 6 and the stopping of the sun in 10:12-14—as well as a passable collection of historical puzzles (*was* it Hai whose capture is related in 7:2-8:29?) to which no certain solution can as yet be given. The object of this note is to suggest that we should make no attempt at the detailed exegesis of Joshua, or of any other book, secular or religious, until we have decided on general grounds the character of the book with which we are dealing. How platitudinous that remark now seems! Yet it is only in comparatively recent years that a principle of interpretation which was taken for granted in dealing with secular works has been seriously and fruitfully applied to Holy Writ. Now it is commonplace to stress the importance of discovering and taking account of the literary genre, the type of writing, of each book and

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction à la Vie et aux Vertus Chrétiennes*, Paris 1657, pp. 313-14