

repentance ; and we do it in the same way as our Lord did it. What in Christ is Redemption, in the Christian is repentance. Our Lord made suffering and death into a means of Redemption ; we also take them, and make them an expression of repentance. Our Lord's Redemption was, in the sense that we have seen, an expression of repentance ; our Christian life is a living out of the Redemption, which is a living out of repentance. ' If we are dead with Christ, then we believe that we shall also live with him. . . . His death was a death to sin once and for all, and life to God. You also look on yourselves as dead to sin, and living to God in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 6:8-11).

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THE PROPHETICAL MEANING OF CELIBACY—II

II *Propter Regnum Caelorum* : Positive aspect

A previous article¹ has shown that, according to the Bible, and according to Jeremias and St Paul especially, celibate life is a prophecy in action, a foreboding of the end, a public proclamation of the fleeting character of this world.

It goes without saying that this is only one aspect of the mystery. There is another one. The last days are not only days of doom : they are also days of resurrection. Jeremias was not only the prophet of the fall of Jerusalem : he was also the prophet of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-5). Similarly for St Paul the last days are only secondarily days of woe : primarily, they are the days of the Parousia when Christ will come and hand over to the Father the world revived by the Spirit (1 Cor. 15). The Apocalypse ends its enumeration of the eschatological calamities by the resplendent description of the heavenly Jerusalem where everything is made new (Apoc. 21). Christ's death on Calvary was only the beginning of his Exaltation (Jn. 3:14-15 ; 12:32-3). The full prophetic meaning of virginity is to be understood in reference to the whole mystery of death and life contained in Christ. Celibacy is not only an enacted prophecy of the imminent doom : it announces also and anticipates the life to come, the life of the new world in the Spirit.

Jeremias, who had announced the New Covenant, might have

¹ *Scripture*, 1960, pp. 97-105

understood that virginity would be the typical state in that new life which was no longer to be granted by the power of the flesh but by the Spirit. But in fact he does not seem to have realised these implications of his prophetic teaching. Or if he did, he had no occasion to express it. We have to come to the Gospels to find this doctrine expounded.

Jesus lived a celibate life. We cannot say that his case was unique. By the beginnings of the Christian era, the ideal of virginity seems to have been cultivated at least in some restricted circles of Judaism. We have seen the rather mysterious case of the Essenes. John the Baptist also must have observed celibacy. This movement might explain the purpose of virginity expressed by Mary in Lk 1:34.¹ Jesus assumed that ideal and by his very life fulfilled the latent aspirations it contained.

Yet there is very little in the Gospels about virginity. This is not surprising. The Gospels are only factual summaries. There is little in them for introspection and self-analysis. They have little to say about Jesus' personal life. They do not tell us how he felt when praying, when working miracles, when undergoing the trials of his Passion. It is no wonder therefore that they should be almost completely silent concerning Jesus' celibacy. This silence gives more value to the one statement of the Gospels in which Christ explained how he understood his virginity.

It was on an occasion in which he had emphasised once more the law of indissolubility of matrimony. The disciples could hardly understand the intransigence of the Master. As usual Jesus tried to bring light to the discussion by taking it to a higher level. The heart of the matter is not the convenience of men but the requirements of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God does make exacting demands upon its members. See the case of those to whom it has been given to realise fully the implications of the coming of the Kingdom: they can be compared to eunuchs!

There are eunuchs who were born so from their mother's womb
and there are eunuchs who were made so by men
and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so in view of the
Kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 19:12)

Though this pericope appears in Matthew only, there is no reason to deny its authenticity. In his book on the Synoptic Gospels, L. Vaganay insists several times that Mt. 19:10-12, along with several other passages, though appearing in one Gospel only, belongs to the oldest layer of the Gospel formation, and to the most ancient tradition

¹ cf. R. Laurentin, *Luc I-II*, Paris 1957, pp. 176-88

common to the three Synoptic Gospels.¹ If the text figures in Matthew only, it is not because it was added afterwards to the final edition of Matthew : it is not a case of addition by Matthew but of omission by Mark and Luke. The pericope on the eunuchs has an archaic ring that would have been shocking to Gentile ears. It is the kind of coarse Semitic paradox, frequent in the Bible, quite appealing to the rough peasants of Palestine accustomed to the loud and often brutal eloquence of the prophets. It could hardly be exported to Greece or even to Asia Minor, Syria or Egypt. It is not surprising that Mark and Luke preferred to drop it. Yet 'its very paradoxical aspect guarantees its authenticity.'² Moreover, the parallel text of Mark seems to leave traces of the amputation. In Mk. 10:10, after the discussion with the Pharisees on matrimony, Jesus returns home together with his disciples. There is a change of place and of audience : Jesus is now in the intimate circle of his disciples. Usually when he retires together with them, it is to teach a deeper doctrine (Mk. 4:10, 34 ; 7:17 ; 9:30 ; 10:32). One would expect here, 'at home,' further explanations on the views he has just exposed. Yet, according to Mk. 10:10-12, Jesus merely repeats the elementary explanations which, according to Mt. 19:9, 5:32 and Lk. 16:18, he would as well give to the crowds. Does not this mean that in the source Mark used, there was 'at home' some other deeper teaching imparted to the disciples? But what other teaching was there except the logion on the eunuchs recorded by Matthew? Mark removed that saying, but the operation has left a scar in the text.

If the pericope does belong to the origins of the Gospel composition, there is no reason to doubt that it was really an utterance of Jesus and this decides the question of its exact bearing.

In the concrete context of Jesus' celibate life, it is easy to find out to whom the third category of eunuchs refers. When the disciples heard that saying, they could but think of Jesus himself and possibly also of John the Baptist. It is clear that Jesus here speaks of his own case and explains it. He does not advocate self-mutilation : he sets up his own example. He observed virginity and he did it consciously 'in view of God's Kingdom.' John the Baptist had done it before him ; others would follow. Thus Jesus presents himself as the leader in a line of men who, thinking of God's Kingdom, will live like eunuchs, giving up the use of their sexual powers.³

¹ L. Vaganay, *Le Problème Synoptique*, Paris-Tournai 1954, pp. 167, 211, 216, etc.

² *op. cit.*, p. 167

³ This evidently settles the problem, discussed from the time of Origen onwards, of whether the saying should be understood in a realistic or in a symbolic sense. In Kittel's *TWNT* (I, p. 590), Schmidt favours the realistic interpretation : the saying would allude to people who actually castrated themselves ; it would invite the disciples

But what is exactly the relation between virginity and God's Kingdom? Why should one remain a celibate *propter regnum caelorum*? What is the precise value of that *propter* (*dia* in Greek)? In biblical Greek, *dia* with the accusative denotes causality or finality (out of, for the sake of, in view of). It is obvious that, in this context, the meaning must be of finality. But this is still very vague, too vague to base on it an explanation of virginity. We cannot build a theology on the strength of a preposition.

If the preposition is vague, the phrase 'Kingdom of Heaven,' on the contrary, is clear enough. The Kingdom of Heaven—or the Kingdom of God, since both phrases have the same significance¹—appears as a key concept of the Synoptic Gospels. It stands at the centre of Jesus' preaching. If not exactly in Judaism, at least in Jesus' mouth, it is 'a comprehensive term for the blessings of salvation,'² having practically the same meaning as 'the age to come' or 'the life of the age to come.'³ It is essentially an eschatological entity. What the Jews had longed for, the prophets had promised and the Apocalyptic writers had described, the new life coming from above, the new world, the new Covenant imparted by God, the new Israel, the gift of the Spirit, Resurrection and Re-creation: it is all that which is contained in God's Kingdom.

But—and this is the novelty of Jesus' teaching—with his coming, the eschatological world, the world to come has become present, though it remains unfulfilled. With the coming of Jesus the Kingdom of God offers the paradoxical character of being at the same time future

¹ 'The Heaven' is a term used by the Jews as a substitute for God to avoid pronouncing the divine name.

² G. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, Edinburgh 1902, p. 135. Dalman shows that Jesus somewhat altered the meaning of the phrase by giving it a specifically eschatological value in connection with Dan. 7:27. So, though in Judaism the phrase should be translated 'the kingship of God,' it becomes, in Jesus' teachings, synonymous with eschatological salvation.

³ Hence the equivalence with the Johannine theme of 'eternal life.'

not to imitate them but, at least, to reflect on their earnestness. Origen himself is a proof that there were such cases in the early Church. But was it so during Jesus' own life-time? It is rather doubtful and still more doubtful that Jesus would have set as an example this hypothetical aberrant behaviour. In the same *TWNT* of Kittel (II, p. 765), J. Schneider maintains the traditional interpretation.

The problem could be viewed also from the angle of Form Criticism. What are the concrete circumstances in the life of the early Church which led to a reminiscence of these words of the Master? What is the concrete problem to which they were given as an answer? It was most evidently the problem of the virgins, an acute problem as we know from 1 Cor. 7, and possibly also, together with it, the problem of the widows 'who are truly widows' (1 Tim. 5:3; cf. 1 Cor. 7:8). According to J. Dupont, *Mariage et Divorce dans l'Évangile*, Bruges 1959, the saying would refer to the case of husbands separated from their wives. This is a rather far-fetched *Sitz im Leben*; moreover it overlooks completely the reference to Jesus' own example.

and present. Jesus assures us that it is already present among us (Mt. 12:28 ; cf. Lk. 12:21) but he also invites us to pray for its coming (Mt. 6:10). Exegetes have tried to rationalise this mystery by reducing Jesus' preaching to one or the other aspect. The 'consequent eschatology' of A. Schweitzer retained only the future aspect : the life of Jesus was mere expectation of an imminent advent of the Kingdom, expectation which was deceived by the event. On the contrary, the 'realised eschatology' of C. H. Dodd retains only the present element : with Jesus, the Kingdom is present and there is nothing to expect from the future ; eschatological elements should be dismissed as mere apocalyptic phraseology. Both views are only partial. Kümmel¹ and Cullmann,² among others, have shown that the integral teaching of Christ combines both aspects. In Jesus the powers of the coming aeon are already active and the future Kingdom of God is already at work in the present. The Spirit is given. Yet He works only like a seed : present in Jesus and in those who will follow him, He has still to extend His influence to the whole world till His life-giving activity covers and transforms the whole creation. Such is the meaning of the 'parables of the Kingdom' (Mk. 4 and parallels). We are still waiting for the end : the period we live in is at the same time 'Promise and Fulfilment.'

This appears especially in the 'signs' of the Kingdom. According to the biblical conception, a 'sign' is not a pure symbol, faint image of a distant reality. It is the reality itself in its initial manifestation. In the biblical sign the coming reality is already contained, yet still hidden.³ Kümmel has shown how in that sense Jesus' victory over the devils and his miracles are signs of that kind.⁴ They show already 'the coming consummation of salvation breaking in on the present.'⁵ Cullmann has added to those signs the main ecclesiastical functions : the missionary preaching of the Gospel,⁶ the cult and the sacraments for, in them also, in the Spirit, and 'through the merits of Christ, everything is fulfilled which was accomplished in the past history of salvation and which will be achieved in the future.'⁷

In the light of Mt. 19:12 we can add virginity to those signs. Like the miracles and the sacraments virginity is a 'sign of the Kingdom,' an anticipated realisation of the final transformation, the glory of the world to come breaking in on the present condition. Such is the meaning of *propter regnum caelorum*. Jesus and many of those who

¹ *Promise and Fulfilment*, London 1957

² *Christ et le Temps*, Neuchatel-Paris 1947

³ cf. J. Pedersen, *Israel, its Life and Culture*, 1926, I, pp. 168ff.

⁴ *op. cit.*, pp. 105-21

⁵ *op. cit.*, p. 121

⁶ *Christ et le Temps*, pp. 111-17

⁷ O. Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, London 1953, p. 35

follow him refrain from sexual activity 'in view of the Kingdom,' that is, to live already now the life of the world to come. Eschatological life has begun to stir in them and that life will be, and can already be now, a life which has gone beyond the necessity and the urge of procreation. As with their preaching and miracles, Jesus and his disciples by their celibacy proclaim the advent of the Kingdom. They exemplify already in this world the future condition of men in the next aeon.

As Jesus explained to the Sadducees (Mt. 22:30 par.), in the world of Resurrection, 'one shall neither marry nor be married, one will be like the angels in heaven.' This does not mean that man in the Kingdom of God will be asexual, losing his human nature to become a pure spirit in the philosophical sense of the term. Such a philosophical consideration would be quite alien to the biblical mentality. Man was not made as a pure spirit neither in this world nor in the other, and consequently celibacy cannot consist in trying to ape the angels. St Luke explains the exact meaning of this analogy between the risen man and the angels in his rendering of the logion. 'They shall neither marry nor be married for they are no more liable to die: for they are equal to the angels and they are sons of God, being sons of Resurrection' (Lk. 20:35-6). The point of resemblance with the angels is not their spiritual nature but their immortality. It is on account of his immortality that the risen man need no longer procreate. Life of Resurrection is no more a life 'in the flesh,' in a body doomed to death. It is a life in God, a life of son of God, life 'in the Spirit,' in a body transformed by the divine Glory. Hence the functions of the flesh become useless; procreation loses its meaning which was to make up for the ravages of death.

The celibate shows by his condition that such life has already started. His celibacy testifies to what O. Cullmann has called 'the proleptic deliverance of the body.'¹ It proclaims that, in Christ, despite the appearances, man escapes the clutches of death and lives in the Spirit.

A passage of the Apocalypse echoes that teaching. Apoc. 14:1-5 describes the glory of the Lamb in the heavenly Sion. There his throne is surrounded by a hundred and forty-four thousand men, all those who 'were redeemed from the earth.' They represent the

¹ O. Cullmann, *The Early Church*, London 1956, pp. 165-76. In his article Cullmann does not extend his conclusions to the question of celibacy. He shows only that marriage has a special theological value since it 'corresponds to the relation between Christ and his Church' (p. 173; cf. Eph. 5:29). This view is quite true but should be completed by an awareness that the love between Christ and the Church is of an eschatological—hence virginal—type. The Spouse is a Virgin (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2). Similarly, even conjugal love will have eventually to turn into the eschatological virginal *agape* of which celibacy is a prophetic type.

perfect number of all those who, saved by the Lamb, will constitute his retinue in the world to come, namely all the elect. Their main characteristic consists in that 'they are virgins' (v. 4). Virginité must be understood metaphorically: it means primarily fidelity to God by opposition to idolatry, often described in Scripture as a 'prostitution.' Yet considering the realistic value of Hebrew symbolism, the concrete sense of virginité should not be altogether dismissed: 'they have not defiled themselves with women' (v. 4).¹ This does not mean that the author would make of virginité a necessary condition for entering the Kingdom. This passage must be understood in parallelism with ch. 7, which also describes a hundred and forty-four thousand men leading an innumerable multitude which surrounds the throne of the Lamb. Whilst in ch. 14 they are all virgins, in ch. 7 they are all martyrs. This should not be understood as meaning only martyrdom can lead to salvation. But it does mean that one has no access to the Kingdom unless 'he washes his robe and makes himself white in the blood of the Lamb' (Apoc. 7:14). The martyr is the typical Christian for he shares the most closely in the Cross of his Master. One cannot be a Christian unless he shares in some way in the fate of the martyrs, in the Cross of Christ. The same interpretation can be extended to the fourteenth chapter. 'As martyrdom, virginité is eminently representative of Christian life. Even as one cannot be saved without participating in the dignity of martyrdom, one cannot be saved without participating in the dignity of virginité. Virginité is a heavenly perfection, an anticipation, for those who are called to it, of what will be the final destiny of all in the Kingdom of Heaven.'² In the world to come all are virgins. Even those who are married must keep their eyes on that ideal and know that their love has to turn into virginal charity. Those who remain celibate 'in view of the Kingdom of Heaven' belong to the virginal retinue of their heavenly King the Lamb. As St Gregory of Nyssa says: 'Virginal life is an image of the happiness that will obtain in the world to come; for it contains in itself many signs of the good things which in hope are laid before us. . . . For when one brings in himself the life according to the flesh to an end, as far as it depends on him, he can expect "the blessed hope and the coming of the great God," curtailing the interval of the intervening generations between himself and God's advent. Then he can enjoy in the present life the choicest of the good things afforded by the Resurrection.'³

¹ cf. L. Cerfaux-J. Cambier, *L'Apocalypse de St Jean lue aux Chrétiens*, Paris 1955, pp. 124ff.

² *op. cit.*, p. 125

³ *De Virginitate*, P.G. 46, 381f. The theme of celibacy as heavenly life or angelic life is frequent in Patristic literature. cf. L. Bouyer, *The Meaning of Monastic Life*, London 1955, pp. 23-40.

Thus the mystery of virginity, as any mystery of Christian life, has a double aspect. It has a negative aspect: it represents the death of Christ and, through it, looks towards the complement of that death, the end of all, the apocalyptic consummation. It has also a positive aspect: it shows forth the new life in the Spirit, initiated by the Resurrection of Christ, to be fulfilled at the Parousia.

This doctrine is best embodied in the Lukan account of the Virgin birth of Christ. Mary is a Virgin (Lk. 1:34) and, in her virginity, through the operation of the Spirit, she gave birth to Christ, the 'first born' of the new world. Thus, in her virginal fecundity, she anticipated and even originated the recreation of the world through the Spirit.

In that account it must be first noticed that Luke—and Mary—following the Hebrew mentality, do not extol virginity for its own sake. In the *Magnificat* Mary describes her condition of virgin as a condition of *humilitas*, that is a low condition (Lk. 1:48). This was exactly the term used by Anna in 1 Sam. 1:11 to qualify her disgrace of having no child. In fact the whole narrative of the virgin birth of Christ in Luke is built in parallelism with the narratives of the Old Testament describing how sterile women were made miraculously fecund by God.¹ To some extent Luke puts Mary's virginity on a par with the sterility of those women. By remaining a virgin, Mary shares in the wretchedness of Jephthe's daughter, in the abjection of the poor women who had no child (Gen. 16:4; 1 Sam. 1:1-16; Lk. 1:25). She accepted willingly the utter poverty and the opprobrium of those who had no hope of reaching, in motherhood, their human plenitude and who consequently were rejected by the world as useless.

But in the New Kingdom by God's transforming power, there is a reversal of the human values. The lowly are exalted (Lk. 1:52), the poor possess the earth (Lk. 6:20), those who weep laugh (Lk. 6:21), the sterile and the virgins are visited by the power of the Spirit and become receptacles of the divine life. These are simply various aspects of the revolution of the Cross turning infamy into glory, death unto life. The glorious fecundity of Mary's humble virginity contains already the mystery of the Cross. The hopelessness of her virginity points to the hopelessness of the Cross: it proclaims that the world is doomed and that no salvation is to be expected from the flesh. But the fecundity of that virginity presages the triumph of the Cross: by the power of the Holy Ghost life will spring from death as it had sprung from the closed womb of a virgin. Thus Mary's virginity

¹ cf. S. Lyonnet, 'Le Récit de l'Annonciation,' in *L'Ami du Clergé*, LXVI (1956), pp. 37-8, and J. P. Audet, 'L'Annonce à Marie,' in *Revue Biblique*, LXIII (1956), pp. 346-74

announces the disappearance of the world of flesh and the rise of a new world of the Spirit. Jeremias's celibacy had prophesied the first part of the mystery. To Mary it was given to see the fulfilment and to prophesy, in her life, both aspects of the imminent consummation.

Mary's virginity was prophetic: it turned towards the Cross and anticipated the end; it inaugurated the new world where the flesh has no power, for that world knows no other fecundity than the fecundity of the Spirit. The charism of virginity in the Church continues and completes that prophetic function. Like Mary and Jesus, the Christian celibate renounces any worldly hope, for he knows that the world has no hope to propose. But, in his loneliness, he announces and through faith already enjoys the eschatological visitation of the Spirit.

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ESSENISM AND CHRISTIANITY—II¹

Comparison of Essene Theology with the Message of Jesus

How does the thought of Jesus in the Gospel compare with such grandeur, a grandeur none the less limited by its paradoxes and its narrowmindedness? Let us attempt a comparison of the two. For our Lord, it is not a question of preserving the light already existing in the world and leading it back to God, a kind of centripetal movement, as it were. That is the view of the Essene: to lead the light to the light is how he conceives his role, a choosing out of what is pure in this world and leading it all back to its origin, to God Himself. But this is by no means the idea that Jesus has. He has quite a different perspective. For him the divine light itself comes into this world to lighten the darkness. It actually enters into the world—the light, which is the Word, is made flesh and itself penetrates our darkness. That is the new element. It is a sort of new conquest by the light, which is God Himself, and victory over the darkness which is on all sides.

Viewed in this way infidelity is not some kind of created reality, obscure and unchangeable, standing in contrast to fidelity. It is not that at all. It is merely the refusal that a heart, always free, can make

¹ cf. *Scripture*, 1960, pp. 119–26