

PROPOSITUM



LIFE IN CHASTITY

(TOR Rule, Chapter 4)

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EDITORIAL

The third issue of *Propositum* in this series on the evangelical counsels deals with the vow of chastity. The contributors to this issue present the understanding of chastity from differing cultural contexts. It was the intention of the Council of the IFC-TOR to carry forward the understanding of the living of the vowed life as being a disturbing presence within the Church and the world. Perhaps it is the counsel of chastity that best illustrates this dimension of the religious life.

Commenting on the representation of the lower basilica of St. Francis, Dr. Nepi draws our attention to the virtues that encapsulate the Franciscan ideal of the vow of chastity: purity and fortitude which are derived from baptism and need to be preserved even if by means of penance. In this the Franciscan understanding is that which links chastity with poverty renouncing all things even exclusive relationships to follow Christ.

It may be seen that the various cultures have all had difficulty in appropriating the value of chastity and each has dealt with it in differing ways. There is general acknowledgment that chastity or celibacy is counter-culture to the values of life generation that is a normal expectation obviously for the survival of the society. The articles in this issue all point in the direction of realizing that the Gospel value of chastity is one that is generative in a more profound manner.

Sr. Louise Hembrecht notes that in a North American context chastity is understood as allowing one to go beyond

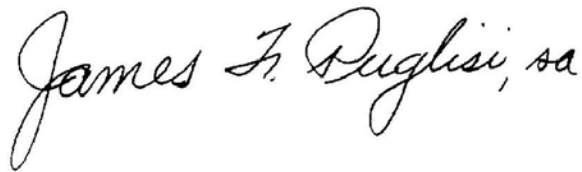
oneself, even beyond the need to be loved. The purpose is ground oneself in loving God and so be able to reach out to others in gentleness, compassion and love.

Sr Violet Grennan, after tracing the development of the vow in the early Middle Ages and Franciscan sources, talks about the gift that sexuality is for the human being. For the religious the use of this gift is to render glory to God by responding to the call to a deeply intimate, personal relationship with God. This relationship finds expression in a manner of living which gives witness to this God-centered relationship and spends itself lavishly bringing about God's reign more fully here and now.

The final two articles present us with very challenging reflections. In reflecting from an Asian cultural view point, Sr. Monica Kim affirms the counter cultural understanding of celibacy within the Korean culture. However, it is the value of the fraternity that is the place where fraternal love grows and is experienced in life and in relationships. We might say that the understanding of chastity/celibacy is intimately related to the inter-relationships that are to be an essential part of the tissue of society in Asia. The challenge for Franciscan religious life is to be an authentic place for the manifestation of these values.

Finally in Sr. Basil Nzimande's reflections on Consecrated Chastity as a Gospel value we see the same thread of the counter cultural aspect of chastity in African culture. She affirms the need for greater study on the vow and its theological articulation. This poses a challenge to religious men and women as they attempt to live faithfully their commitment to the vowed life. Sometimes there are serious

consequences of rejection for the religious due to the perceived failure to pass on life in a generative manner. An awareness of these realities is important for leadership so that they may help in the formative process to provide sufficient anthropological and theological studies on the questions of sexuality and religious life.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Fr. Puglisi, SA". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "James" and "Puglisi" being significantly larger and more decorative than the rest of the text.

James Fr. Puglisi, SA
President IFC-TOR



The Allegory of Chastity in the Frescoes of the Lower Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi

Brief Iconographic Notes

Dot. Loredana Nepi

Assisi, Lower Basilica of Saint Francis, the crossing Vault, Giottesque Master (Master delle Vele), The Allegory of Chastity 1315-1320 (approximately)

The fresco representing the Allegory of Chastity occupies the northern vault cell of the transept in the Lower Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi. The Triumph of Saint Francis and the Franciscan vows of Obedience, Poverty and Chastity are illustrated through complex allegories in the four cells of the transept. The date and attribution of these frescoes are the object of a long and heated critical debate but, at present, the more diffused opinion attributes them to the hand of a Giottesque Master called the Master of the Vele (the vaulting cells), dating around the second decade of 1300d.¹

The cells dedicated to the vows present a very strong unity in style and composition. Their iconographic program, does not seem to have been minimally inspired by contemporary models, but rather it represents the fruit of an original reflection on the Franciscan values as expressed in the Rule and in the biographical sources of the Founder of the Order. The inscriptions on the arches that separate the vaults from the crossing of the transept of the vaults of the nave or aisle and of the transept favour the interpretation of the allegories, but do not furnish a detailed explanation of all the elements of the frescoes.²

The cell of the Allegory of Chastity is dominated by a castle surrounded by towered walls. Chastity is represented as a young woman covered by a white wimple, in prayer inside another embattled tower. On the tower a white flag flows fixed on a support for a bell. Two angels, suspended on the side of the window of the tower, offer Chastity a miniature of a date palm and another object that is not clearly identifiable, generally interpreted as a crown.

From the walls of the castle in which Chastity has taken refuge, Purity (*Munditia*) and Fortitude (*Fortitudo*) turn toward the center of the scene: a naked young man is submerged into a tub, an angel pours water on the head and two angels on the side wait holding in their hand a friar's frock. Purity offers the young man a white banner, while Fortitude extends its hand as if wanting to invite him to go up to the castle. On the outside of the walls, winged warriors armed with shield and whip surround the fortress.

On the left hand corner of the composition Francis accepts a Poor Clare, a friar and a lay person. Like in the other cells, the Saint is represented as a young man, beardless, and pierced by the Stigma.³

On the right hand corner Penance and three angels cast out Love (*Amor*), Passion (*Ardor*) and Impurity (*Immunditia*). Penance is represented as a winged friar, with his head covered by the cowl and surrounded by the hexagonal halo which indicates Virtues. Penance lashes Love with a whip, a blond winged and bandaged Cupid, crowned with roses, armed with a bow; a line of hearts hangs from the shoulder strap of the quiver. The kind aspect of the young man is in contrast

with his crow's-feet of a bird of prey. The three angels are carrying a lance, a vase and a cross, the symbols of the Passion of Christ, because according to the inscription, against her enemies Chastity is protected by the wounds of the suffering Christ. They oppose themselves to Passion, imagined as a satyr of the burning head, and to Impurity represented by the head of a wild boar. And even Death, a black skeleton that waves a sickle, participates in this battle.

As mentioned before, in order to explore the complexity of the Allegory of Chastity in the Lower Basilica of Assisi it is useful to refer directly to the Franciscan Sources which frequently use a language that has a strong visual impact, which can easily be translated into iconographic solutions. Thomas of Celano⁴ and Bonaventure from Bagnoregio⁵, when referring to this episode in which the Saint, close to the hermitage of Sarteano, is tempted by the Devil against Chastity. He scourges himself with a rope to cast out the temptation, using metaphors which are very enlightening for the interpretation of the fresco being examined. Thomas introduces the episode stressing the vigilance of Francis against the temptation “as a courageous warrior”. Bonaventure instead says that the Saint “Like a sentinel on the guarding tower, kept watch with rigorous discipline and extreme care to guard the purity of the body and of the spirit”. The representation of Chastity, closed up in the guarding tower (a function underlined by the presence of the bell), surrounded by the guards armed with lashes, therefore, reminds the members of the Order the duty of vigilance in the keeping of the vow of chastity as indicated in the Rule, through recalling the life of Francis. The prayerful attitude of the confined person recalls the importance of prayer.

The detail also on the left corner, in which a Poor Clare, a friar and a lay person present themselves to Francis, refers to the Franciscan Sources. This reminds us of the admission into the Order of lay married persons also referred to by Bonaventura in the *Legenda maior*⁶, and to the institution of the Order of penitents, open to the laity of both sexes, as recalled in a verse of the *Officium rhythmicum S. Francisci* of Giuliano da Spira.⁷ The role of Chastity on the road of salvation, also proposed by Francis to spouses, is clearly defined in the *Vita secunda* of Thomas of Celano in the episode of the woman of Volusiano, who inspired by Francis, proposes to her husband to “place continence or temperance as the foundation in the soul and then edify upon it the other virtues.”⁸

Like in the other cells, the central scene of this pictorial space is occupied by the symbolical representation of the “rite of passage”. In the cell of Obedience that was expressed by conferring the “yoke”, in the cell of Poverty by the mystical marriage of Francis with Lady Poverty. In the cell of Chastity by the “rite of passage” and is represented by the washing by the hands of angels, of a young man submerged within a basin which is similar to a Baptismal font. The scene is very dense, rich in significance. The baptismal washing indicates a journey of purification and of spiritual rebirth, supported by the virtues of Purity (*Munditia*) and by Fortitude (*Fortitudo*). The gesture of the symbolical figure of Fortitude that invites the young man to go inside the castle clearly indicates that the path toward Chastity takes place through the exercise of the virtue of Fortitude.

The nakedness of the young man strongly recalls the act of renunciation made by Francis before the Bishop of Assisi and one of the emblematic or symbolic values for the fraternity: *nudus sequi Christum nudum*. The passage through nakedness indicates the violent breaking away of Francis from the family and social bonds⁹ and recalls one of the evangelical passages that Francis in the *unapproved Rule (non bullata)* places in relationship with the vows: “If anyone wants to come to me and does not hate his father, mother, wife and children, the brothers and sisters and even his own life he cannot be my disciple”.¹⁰

Dot. Loredana Nepi
Librarian Centro Pro Unione (Rome)

¹ A. Tomei. “La decorazione della Basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi come metafora della questione giottesca”, (The decoration of the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi as a metaphore of the Giottesque question” – *ImagoRomae [in linea] February 22, 2009.* <http://www.imagoromae.com/public/ftp/fotoDiServizio/files/Giotto/Saggio-Alessandro-Tomei.pdf>. Consultato il 5 novembre 2010.

² The inscription regarding the allegory of Chastity reads: “[e Castitati oranti pro victoria corone datur capital / ad hanc querens actingere honestate se tegat; loco datur pertingere si Fortitudo protegat/ dum castitas protegitur pro virtuosa munera; nam contra hostes legitur per passi Christi vulnera. / Defendit penitentia castigando se crebrius, mortis reminiscencia dum mentem pulsat sepius / fratres surures advocat et continentes coniuges cunctos ad eam provocat Franciscus.” [...] To Chastity that prays to obtain victory is given the veil as a crown; the one who seeks to attain it does so with sincerity; and is granted to reach it, only if Fortitude protects, while Chastity is defended through virtuous gifts; in fact, against the enemies is protected by the wounds of the suffering Christ. Penance defends itself by repeatedly chastising itself, while the thought of death frequently comes to mind. Francis reminds the brothers and sisters of this and proposes it to all couples who practice continence.” Cfr. Giorgio Bonsanti, ed. *La Basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi*. *Mirabilia Italiae* 11, Modena: Panini, 2002, pp. 396-397.

³ The bond or link between the stigma and the approbation of the Rule is illustrated by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio in the major Legend , Chapter IV, 9-10.

⁴ Tommaso da Celano,, *Vita secunda sancti Francisci*, Chapter LXXXII, 116.

⁵ Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, *Legenda maior*, Chapter V, 3.

⁶ Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, *Legenda maior*, Chapter IV, 6: “This new Order admitted all, clergy and lay persons who were virgins and also married lay persons of both sexes, because the way of penance is common to all who wish to tend toward Heaven.”

⁷ Giuliano da Spira, *Officium rhythmicum S. Francisci, Ad Laudes Antiphonae* 18, 3: “*Tres Ordines hic ordinat: /Primumque Fratrum nominat/Minorum, pauperumque/Fit Dominarum medius/Sed Poenitentum tertius/Sexum capit utrumque.*”

⁸ Tommaso da Celano. *Vita secunda sancti Francisci*, Chapter IX, 38.

⁹ Dominique Donadieu-Rigaut, *Pnser en images les ordres religieux: XII – XV siècles*. Paris : arguments, 2005, p. 121.

¹⁰ *Regula non bullata*, Chapter I, 4

Chastity – Clear Witness to God’s Love

Sr. Louise Hembrecht

The words “poor and poverty,” “obedient and obedience” are found throughout the writings of St. Francis. The word “chastity” is seldom used. It is used in the Rule: “The rule and life of these brothers is this, namely: “to live in obedience, in chastity, and without anything of their own.¹” In the Later Rule, St. Francis states that “The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without anything of one’s own, and in chastity.”

Moreover, one can read the writings of St. Francis and find various references to what it means to be obedient and poor. This is not so in the case of Chastity unless one considers Chapter XII: “Impure Glances and Frequent Association with Women;” Chapter XIII: “Avoiding Fornication” from the Earlier Rule and Chapter XI of the Later Rule: “The Brothers May Not Enter the Monasteries of Nuns” as what it means to live in chastity. Further reading of the writing of St. Francis and the life of Francis indicate that while these were common prescriptions of the times, they do not describe Francis’ view of chastity.

In the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful after speaking of the Institution of the Blessed Sacrament and the Passion, Francis writes: “And He wishes all of us to be saved through Him and receive Him with our heart pure and our body chaste:”² It is worth noting that a pure heart precedes a chaste body.

The only other time the word “chaste” is used is in *The Canticle of the Creatures*. St. Francis prays: “Praised be to You, my Lord, through Sisters Water, Who is very useful and humble and chaste.”³

It might seem strange to use the word “chaste” to describe water unless one considers some of the qualities of water – purity, transparency and the fact that water is life giving. The word purity occurs several times in the writings of St. Francis. Generally it refers to a “pure heart and a pure mind”⁴ and is used in the context of single heartedness or oneness of mind and heart.

Transparency or clarity is another quality of water either of which is necessary if chastity is to have meaning and is to be life giving. In both versions of the Letter to the Faithful, St. Francis writes: “We are mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through a divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and give birth to Him through a holy activity which must shine as an example before others.”⁵

What does this mean in North America in the twenty-first century? What does it mean to a particular mid-western Franciscan congregation founded in the United States in the second part of the nineteenth century whose ministry reaches beyond the Midwest but is within the U.S.? How does this Community, the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, live a life of chastity in such a way as to be a disturbing presence in today’s world? How can being countercultural, a disturbing presence by living a life of chastity, be an invitation to modern culture?

Certainly the traditional understanding of purity continues to be understood by the vow of Chastity in North America in the twenty-first century, but perhaps the idea of being single hearted is even more the focus of what Francis tried to express and what we must live in today's world. The Letter to the Faithful adds the dimension of divine love and a holy activity.

In Chapter IV of the Third Order Rule, we read: "Professing chastity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, they are to care for the things of the Lord and they have nothing else to do except follow the will and the Lord and to please Him. In all of their works the love of God and all people should shine forth." The Constitutions of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity put it this way: "We, who are drawn by the Holy Spirit to vow chastity voluntarily for the sake of the kingdom, should esteem it as an exceptional gift of grace."⁶

"For the sake of the kingdom" – what does this mean? Well, the "kingdom" is the reign of God, where the love of God and neighbor rules, where we are in right relationship with God and each other. This means now, today, at this time and it also witnesses to the life of all of us after this earthly life.

By our vow of chastity we move into a covenant relationship with God. God consecrates us for a life of undivided love. We say "You Alone" to the Lord. A married person has a spouse who is "you alone.": Our "You Alone" is centered on the Lord. We are called Spouses of Christ.

The document *Vita Consecrata* states, "Joyful living of chastity is a witness of the power of God's love manifested in

the weakness of the human condition.”⁷ In other words, this is an “exceptional gift of grace. First of all, it is a response to a call from God. It is only possible with God’s grace. It comes from love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. It is a deeper living of our baptismal consecration. As a religious, it is the choice to unify one’s life around God, in order to love very broadly. It is a lifelong process of growth into ever greater love.

If we focus on the word “charity” as “agape, that is, loving as Christ loves, loving as God loves, we understand that chastity / charity is a total love for God and for others. There is no genuine love of God which is not also openness to loving the other. At the Green Bay Diocesan Jubilee Mass in May, the Jubilarians were asked this question, “Do you continue to love and welcome into your heart Jesus as center and all who walk with you on your journey?”

Our vowed life has the capacity for configuring us to the person of Jesus Christ, which is what chastity is all about. Scripture tells us “to put on the mind of Christ,” that is to see out of His mind-set. Religious life, the vow of chastity enables us to do this: through prayer, meditation on Sacred Scripture, celebration of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, retreat, the practice of self-discipline, witnessing the example of the others, etc. It is a lifelong process. Putting on the mind of Christ is made real in one way in our relationships. This is where words are transformed into attitudes and actions. As *Vita Consecrata* 22 tells us, consecrated life “constitutes a living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to our brothers and sisters.”⁸

This is what the life of St. Francis was all about. He didn't write much about chastity but the witness of his life gives us an example, a pattern for living chastity in the twenty first century as well as in previous times and into the future. It is a clear and transparent pattern for living a chaste life, but it is not one without struggle.

Throughout his life, Francis was drawn to a life of contemplation in the caves of Assisi. Though pulled in that direction, he seemed to be aware that the "You Alone" life to which God was calling him included everyone and all that God had made. His total love for God expressed itself in his preaching of the Gospel, his service to lepers, his reverence and respect for all people and for all of creation.

At times Francis needed others to tell him that this is what God asked of him. He consulted his brothers, Silvester, Clare, etc. asking if God wanted him to preach or to retire to the caves. Was he to preach or to pray? For Francis the question was a clear witness that a life in community, a life of chastity was a life of dependence and interdependence on his brothers.

This tension is as active in the twenty-first century as it was in the time of St. Francis. The Constitutions of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity expresses it in this way: "By our life of chastity we give ourselves totally to God. He consecrates us for a life of undivided love and immerses us more completely in Himself. This preferential love for the Lord makes an uncompromising demand that we love others as

Christ does, living with them in the heart of Christ and serving them in His name.”⁹

Chastity is made real in our times as it was in the time of Francis through contemplation whether or not it be in a contemplative life style and a common life. Contemplation keeps before us God’s love for us and for all that He made. It keeps the longing of our hearts alive and does not allow us to settle on less than God. It might be said that it is through contemplation that the exclusivity of the “You Alone” of chastity does not exclude. Rather, it is all embracing.

The Constitutions of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity also emphasize the need for a common life and a balanced affective life. “Since a life of chastity is supported when we live a common life in a spirit of charity, we foster love and concern for one another by creating an atmosphere of respect, peace, companionship, and service.” “Because we treasure the gift of chastity, we develop a sound and balanced affective life. We embrace the daily self-denial, vigilance, and mortification of the senses which are essential for great intimacy with God and for a deeper respectful love of ourselves and of others.”¹⁰

There are only two simple prescriptions in the Directory of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity in the section on chastity. 2.6 “We should be well-instructed in the positive value of chastity manifested in the total offering of ourselves to God.” And 2.7 “We should always give personal witness by acting in a manner befitting women consecrated by God. We use prudent judgment in our personal relationships and in our choice of reading, leisure activities and entertainment.”

In summary: Chastity allows us to expand our hearts to include all those loved by God. It allows us to go beyond

ourselves, even beyond our need to be loved so that we can both ground ourselves in loving God and reach out to others in gentleness, compassion and love. In living in this way we discover and experience how much we are loved. This is the essence of chastity that we find in the life of St. Francis. It is this essence of chastity that the world needs to see in our lives today.

Sister Louise Hembrecht is a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, Manitowoc, Wisconsin. She presently serves her Sisters as Community Director.

¹ See the Earlier Rule, I, 1. Note footnote c in *The Saint*. Volume I of *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*. Edited by Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap.; J. A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. Conv.; and William J. Short, O.F.M. New York: New City Press. All quotations from the Writings of Francis are from *The Saint*. Volume I of *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*.

² "Later Admonition and Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance," 14.

³ The Canticle of the Creatures, 7.

⁴ See the Second Letter to the Faithful, 19 or 45 or the Letter to the Entire Order, 43 or the Later Rule 10, 9 or 17, 15 as some examples of the need for a pure heart and a pure mind.

⁵ See the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful, 10 and the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, 53.

⁶ Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, *Constitutions II, C.*

⁷ *Vita Consecrata*, 88.

⁸ This entire section from the reference to the Third Order Rule was lifted from the ideas shared by Sister Patricia Linssen at the Community Meeting of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, July 15, 16, 2011. Often Sister Patricia's exact words were used though not always.

⁹ Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, *Constitutions II, D*

¹⁰ Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, *Constitutions II, 7 and 8.*

Living the Life of Chastity for the Sake of the Kingdom - in the 21st Century

Sr. Violet Grennan, MFIC

Introduction

These reflections on the vow of chastity are based on the fourth chapter of *The Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis, "The Life of Chastity for the Sake of the Kingdom."* I write neither as theologian or Franciscan scholar but as one who attempts to live reflectively and passionately our Rule and Life. I have worked nationally and internationally for more than three decades with women and men religious on issues related to initial and lifelong formation, and specifically on human development/spiritual formation and religious life.

First, a few brief preliminary comments on the development of the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in the larger context of religious life and, in particular, in the Franciscan tradition. Second, these comments will be followed by brief general reflections on the shift in tradition and reflections on the vows and thirdly, a specific reflection on Chapter IV of our TOR: *The Life of Chastity for the Sake of the Kingdom*.

Preliminary Comments

The identification of religious life with the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, did not occur until the early thirteenth century. Until that time, one vowed obedience, for example as a Benedictine or Augustinian, to live the rule. Women and men entered to respond to a call from God to live the Gospel fully, to live for God in every dimension

and every concrete moment of their lives. To live poorly, obediently and chastely was assumed to be included in the commitment as a religious to follow Jesus' example or to live a rule. In the time of Francis and Clare of Assisi, Pope Innocent III identified the religious commitment with the three traditional vows in the context of new religious groups seeking approval for their way of life at the beginning of the thirteenth century. In so far as we know, the first explicit appearance of the three vows was in the Rule for the Trinitarians that Innocent III approved in the early thirteenth century.

It was the Roman Curia, and not Francis, who insisted on the inclusion of the three vows in the first chapter of the Later Rule as: obedience, without anything of one's own, and in chastity (ER 1221). This is the only place in Francis' writings where the vows in their canonical formulation are mentioned. Commenting on this, Joseph Chinnici suggests Francis is more interested in what supports the vow formulation, how it summarizes dimensions of human transformation, how, in short, the vows are really to be interpreted in their anthropological significance (Chinnici, p. 521).

The Writings of Francis

While the Earlier Rule (ER 1) indicates that the brothers are to "live in obedience, in chastity, and without anything of their own," in the Rule of 1221 (ER XII, XIII) and 1223 (LR XI), Francis speaks about chastity only indirectly. In Admonition XVI, the indirect reference reads "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God." A further indirect reference occurs in his Letter to the Entire Order, "I also beg in the Lord all my brothers who are priests...that whenever they wish to celebrate mass, being pure, they offer the True Sacrifice of the

most holy body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ with purity and reverence, with a holy and unblemished intention... (LtOrd 14). References in these excerpts from Francis' writings to those who are "clean of heart," and those who celebrate with "purity and reverence and unblemished intention," can also be understood to suggest speaking and living with integrity and transparency.

In Francis' writings, the word "chaste" appears in only a couple places and not in direct reference to a vow of chastity. In the *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful*, we read "... And He wishes us to be saved through Him and receive Him with our heart pure and our body chaste" (2LtF 14). In Chapter IX of the Later Rule, Francis speaks to how the friars should preach: "... I admonish and exhort those brothers that when they preach their language be well-considered and chaste for the benefit and edification of the people..." (LR IX 3). This indirect reference offers a good interpretation of the meaning of the word "chaste" for Francis. The brothers are to preach with integrity and transparency. Time and again, Francis emphasized that his life and the lives of the early followers, who desired to follow literally in the footprints of the Lord Jesus as recorded in the Gospel, be characterized by word and deed as they moved among the people in villages, cities and towns preaching the Gospel message of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. Well-considered and chaste language would have implicitly meant that this same integrity and transparency would characterize their patterns of relating to God's world and all God's people.

Shifts in Tradition and Reflection

Traditionally a theology of the three classical vows of poverty, chastity and obedience focused on renunciation and

the capacity of the vows to direct one's personal energies toward God. Specifically, in light of these reflections on celibate chastity, an early understanding and emphasis was on renunciation: not getting married; not having a spouse; not engaging in the overt genital acting out of one's sexuality, and in having greater freedom of time and energy for ministry.

A contemporary shift in perspective in the theology of these three vows can best be understood by situating them within religious life. An assumption which undergirds our understanding of religious life, and of Franciscan life, is that the life can only be understood within the mission of the church which, in turn, can only be correctly understood as God's mission (*Missio Dei*), as the mission of Jesus. This mission of bringing about God's reign of peace, justice, reconciliation and restoration of communion more fully is essentially the mission of religious life, of our vowed Franciscan life. This shift in perspective on the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience point to three major dimensions of human life: possession, activity and power, and on three major areas of human interaction - economics, social life, and politics - which structure the global and complex world in which we live. This understanding highlights the interconnectedness of the entire world - a world created by God who saw that it was good, who witnessed the original communion, witnessed those bonds broken and eventually witnessed renewed communion.

As those who desire and vow to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, through living our *Rule and Life*, we are called to assume a significant role in the transformation of the world's structures primarily by the individual and communal prophetic witness of our lives, and through a Spirit-filled critique of

unjust structures and practices in our respective geographic areas of life and mission. In fact, the challenge to respond in **word and deed** calls us – new members and those who have lived the life for decades – to follow in the footprints of Jesus and Francis and become a disturbing presence in our world today. The cost of discipleship will not be cheap; it will require deep faith, great inner freedom and radical availability to respond to God’s call for the sake of our Church and world.

The Life of Chastity for the Sake of the Kingdom

The contemporary, interpretation and lived experience of the vow of chastity for the sake of bringing about God’s reign more fully in the here and now is anything but renunciation of God’s created world. Our Franciscan tradition notes “This world is truly made in God’s image and likeness and all that comes from the Creator is good” (TOR, Ch III, 10). What is to be renounced are those dimensions of life which misdirect its fundamental self-giving, its orientation towards the enjoyment of creation by all, its affective freedom in relationships, its full love of self, God and neighbor. The lived experience of the life of chastity for the sake of the kingdom does call us to reject those dimensions of our relational energy which are characterized by an inordinate self-love and self-preoccupation (Chinnici, p. 525).

As vowed religious we experience simultaneously a double movement: a renunciation of family, property, dominance, and an affirmation of the powers of loving, using, and serving, that is **being human for others** (Chinnici, p. 526). This life journey, which is one of ongoing conversion, is traveled by walking in the footprints of the Lord Jesus,

remaining grounded in God by whom we have been grasped and engaging the world fully in our day as Jesus did in his day.

Early formative experiences of family, culture and church teaching ordinarily have a marked influence, positively and sometimes negatively, on one's understanding and lived experience of human sexuality. As one who was born in Ireland, educated, entered religious life and moved through the early stages of initial formation there, I can attest, on the one hand, little was said, positively or negatively, in home, school, church or novitiate about human sexuality as a positive relational energy – not to mention a gift of God. On the other hand, in working with religious women and men from different parts of the world around topics related to human and spiritual development, I realized my experience in Ireland was not unique.

Such formative influences, spoken or un-spoken, are first observed and experienced in familial patterns of relating, in emotional expression (happiness, sadness, ways of dealing with conflict...), in different standards for women and men, in positive or negative messages about sexuality. In turn, that may hold some continuing influence in how one understands and lives the vowed life, and in this particular instance, the vow of celibate chastity. These formative influences will become apparent in mono-cultural and inter-cultural communities and may necessitate on-going education and formation in light of the life our Rule and Life calls us to live – and which we freely choose to embrace.

Living the vow of celibate chastity certainly does not mean renouncing our human sexuality. Inherent in the Catholic

Tradition's teaching on human sexuality are four convictions: 1) Sexuality is a **gift from God** shared by all persons, regardless of their state in life; 2) It is an **essential dimension of the human person** – a fundamental component of personality through which women and men experience their relatedness to self, others, the world and God; 3) It recognizes the **God-given dignity** of every human person who is created in God's image and likeness and must always take into account the dignity of the human person and the quality of relationship; 4) It is **realized in communion with others** since we are social beings and most fully human when in relationship with others; its relational dimension is further realized when we respond to our call to be co-creators with God and share in God's power **for** creation and not simply **over** creation.

These four convictions of the Catholic traditions' teaching on human sexuality are embedded in Chapter IV of our TOR, *The Life of Chastity for the Sake of the Kingdom*:

*Let the brothers and sisters keep in mind **how great a dignity** the Lord God has given them because He created them and formed them in the image of His beloved Son according to the **flesh** and in His own likeness according to the Spirit (Art. 14). Since they are created through Christ and in Christ, they have **chosen** this form of life which is founded on the **words and deeds** of the Redeemer (Art. 14).*

*Professing chastity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, they are to care for the things of the Lord and they have nothing else to do except to follow the will of the Lord and to please Him. In all of their works the love of **God and all people** should shine forth. (Art. 15).*

*They are to remember that they have been **called by a special gift of grace** to manifest in their lives that wonderful mystery by which the Church is joined to Christ her spouse (Art. 16).*

One's experience of being loved and called by God through this gift of grace and one's free choice to profess chastity for the sake of the reign of God, draws one irrevocably into a passionate relationship with God and all God's creation. The *Commentary* on Art. 16 of our *Rule and Life* reminds us that we "can confidently expect the grace of deep personal union with the Lord." This intimate, personal relationship with God is the anchor in our lives in times of contentment and discontent, joy and sorrow, doubt and confidence.

In loving God and God's creation, no one is excluded because "...all are created in the image of God's beloved Son and in his likeness according to the Spirit..."(Art. 14). The *Commentary* on this article of Chapter IV of our *Rule and Life*, notes our vow of chastity is not "a privatized aspect of religious vocation, but empowers us as brothers and sisters to witness to God's primacy in practical visible ways, especially charity towards our neighbor (p.30)

The Life of Chastity for the Sake of the Kingdom: Vocation and Choice

Sandra Schneiders, IHM writing on consecrated celibacy notes "It is freely chosen and is a response to a personally discerned vocation... **a free gift, a call from God** (emphasis mine) that cannot be imposed, acquired by one's own effort or conferred by authority. One who experiences that call needs to carefully discern the reality of that call and her or his **capacity**

and desire to respond. Then one **freely chooses** to embrace that life. Consecrated celibacy is at the very heart of religious life (SA, p.125). Schneiders notes further, consecrated celibacy is not about what one does with one's sexuality... it is about who and how one chooses to love (SA, p. 127). She holds, celibacy is the life-constituting public vow by which the religious gives herself, himself totally, unreservedly, and perpetually to Jesus Christ to the exclusion of all other primary life commitments (SA, p.124).

Clare of Assisi, in her Testament, shared with her sisters and friars shortly before her death, refers to their form of life as "our vocation and choice" (Test. Vs.16). At the heart of this vocation and choice is the experience of being called and grasped by a passionate God. In choosing to respond to that call we, through on-going choices that we make over a lifetime, are sustained and nourished by healthy relationships, regular prayer, self-reflection and discipline, experiences of solitude and contemplation of God's magnanimous love for us and for God's world. Embracing celibate chastity tells me and others that I cannot share myself totally with another person because of my experience of God. This implies a personal, intimate experience of God, a personal companionship shared in religious community with others who also have chosen to respond to the call. In choosing God, we choose one another. Each brother and sister is gift of God. In communal relationships through shared experiences of joy and hope, of hurt, healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, we witness to the world of a restored community.

Our life then is about giving witness, through a way of being in relationship with self, others, God and God's world,

that the Reign of God is here and is not yet. The lived experience is to be a witness of restored communion to a world where some relationships at every level - communal, familial, societal, political, ecclesial - are fractured or broken. Furthermore, it is meant to be a sign in the Church of the reconstitution of the human community in our fractured world. It is ultimately about God's mission in our midst – the on-going creation and restoration of Communion. Religious Life in general and our life as Franciscans in particular must be fundamentally about Communion and the mission of Jesus, which is the mission of the church.

The challenge and invitation to live celibate chastity passionately for the sake of our Church and world does not become a reality the day we profess first or solemn vows. Rather, experience tells me it is a lifelong journey of integration of value-based choices consistent with our initial choice to embrace the vow, of ongoing conversion, of regular prayer, self-reflection, and fidelity to our covenant with God. As we engage the lived experience of these relationships, in the everyday contexts of our lives, we will undoubtedly experience our need for ongoing conversion as we continually turn to God and to others. This ongoing conversion calls us to acknowledge God in creation, in the scriptures and particularly in the words, life and deeds, and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in each other. In experiences of struggle with our own limited, fleshly humanness and our desire to live and love with an unencumbered heart for the sake of our primary love relationship with God and our relationship with all people (TOR Ch. IV. Art 15), we will come face-to-face with humility, personal poverty of spirit, and the deep desire for God's unconditional compassion and love in our lives. Hopefully,

through these experiences, we will grow in awareness of our own vulnerability and fragility (*minoritas*); come to recognize that all we are and have is gift from a magnanimous God (poverty); and be further drawn into deeper contemplation of our God in the person of Jesus Christ who came among us as a fleshly, vulnerable human being (contemplation).

Conclusion

In drawing these reflections on *The Life of Chastity for the Sake of the Kingdom* to a conclusion, we are reminded, yet one more time, that our God has called us by a special gift of grace, that we have freely chosen this form of life which finds its core meaning in the call to a deeply intimate, personal relationship with God. This relationship finds expression in a manner of living which gives witness to this God-centered relationship and spends itself lavishly bringing about God's reign more fully here and now. Francis' words in the *Letter to the Entire Order* may capture these closing remarks and be a source of inspiration as we continue to follow in the footprints of the Lord Jesus for the life of our Church and world. Francis invites the brothers {and sisters} to:

Look at the humility of God, and pour out your hearts before Him! Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by Him! Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally (LtOrd 28-29).

What other response can we make?

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Consecrated virginity in an oriental society and culture in continuous transformation: the challenges for us as religious

Sr. Monica Kim

Introduction

I feel that it is important and useful to begin my reflection on the theme that has been proposed to me, by connecting the history of the Church in Korea, which has been present since 1784, and with the beginning of religious life which appeared at the end of 1800, when religious freedom was obtained for all.

Religious life in Korea was immediately presented as a sign and eschatological value, as an announcement and anticipation of the goods of Heaven. Christians abandoning everything for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, and choosing religious life, already obtained the “hundredfold” in this world (Mt 10, 19-30) and waited with living hope for the definitive encounter with the Lord.

Religious life renders its members more free from the temptations of the world and expresses in an evident manner the fundamental option for the Kingdom. Besides, it is a witness of the new life which Christ has given us.

The Gospel first entered Korea through Koreans coming from Peking, and not by missionaries, as it generally has happened in other nations. It was a Church that had known martyrdom since the beginning, when in 1784 the Koreans began to be baptized. The teaching of the Church immediately experienced a strong reaction on the part of the Government because it was contrary to the doctrine of Confucianism which

in that period dominated the whole of the Korean society. It found great difficulty particularly because of its opposition to their type of cult to the ancestors. So, very soon many Koreans were martyred, and after this the Korean Church grew very rapidly.

In the year 1950 Catholics were one hundred and fifty thousand and in 1981 a million and a half. And in the same proportion during those years priestly and religious vocations also increased. The reasons for this may be many: the existing political insecurity, the crisis of traditional religions, such as Buddhism, Confucianism and animist Shamanism. The positive image presented of the Church and the witness of the religious who became the voice of the voiceless and radical witnesses of the following of Jesus poor, chaste and obedient, became a point of hope for the Korean people.

Today the Church in Asia is called to face the greatest challenges of evangelization, of enculturation of Christianity, of inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue. In this mosaic and problems the Korean Church and religious life deserve particular attention because of some characteristics which distinguish them. With Catholicism and its attention to the person, the movement for the liberation of women has begun, to help women recognize their dignity. There is still much to be done in this field and it is a long and tiring journey. In Korean society, women are reserved and respectful of their body. In the past virginity was a value very well guarded or protected by women, and they were ready to die rather than lose their virginity. Besides this, there was also a tradition that all women should have with them a dagger hidden under the clothes and be ready to use it as self-defence to save their

virginity. The life-style in the Korean society of the last decades has changed very much. Economic progress, industrialization, urbanization, consumerism, individualism and the excessive use of mass-media have led to the decadence of traditional values, bringing about always a more *secularized life-style*.

In a society continually undergoing transformation, religious life is not exempt from the above mentioned risks. Religious men and women instead of being salt and light for their people, sometimes feel the effects of the influence of secularization, so much so as to have difficulty in finding their own place and in defining their own identity. They live celibacy with greater difficulty compared to the past. The exalting or glorification of egocentric love which has the purpose of pleasure alone and the exploitation of the person are all aspects which render difficult the choice of living a generous and sacrificing love for one's whole life. The myths and contemporary idols confuse the values of religious life.

The dominant contemporary culture which considers sexuality as an absolute value and which cannot accept any type of rule becomes a provocation for total and definitive virginity, which can be saved only in the light of Truth and of Mercy. The gift of self understood and experienced as another and no less authentic capacity to love and to be fecund, as well as the betrothal or nuptial relation with Jesus Christ, can lead the same human love to its beauty, to respect for self, for one's own body, for life.

In the face of the loss of traditional values, such as the sense of belonging to the family, respect for the elderly, openness and moral integrity, the Association of Major

Superiors, proposed to all religious to do a survey to know the situation. Some obstacles were found which prevent religious from living the vow of chastity with fidelity. On the one hand, religious know that it is only from the Lord that one can draw joy and live relationships with the love of oblation which is free and mature. On the other hand, they find incoherence in the choices between the ideal and the real life.

Another problem, which leads to the diminishment of religious vocations is the influence of the culture of *one only child* which comes especially from China. The break down of the family, fleeing in activism, excessive concern or worry for health, the running to studies for one's own fulfilment, bring about a crisis especially among the sisters in the mid-life, who are not able to accept solitude and risk living without joy and hope. The virtual relationships (TV, Internet), can be an impediment for a true relationship with God, with the fraternity and with others, especially for the young Sisters. If God is not the centre of our whole being and way of acting, consecrated virginity can be perceived as constraint which leads the person to close in on self and to live in sadness.

Signs of vitality in consecrated life

In spite of the many challenges that religious men and women have before them today, there are signs of vitality present in religious life in Korea. In recent years knowledge of the urgent need for *on-going or permanent* formation is very strong, understood as recovering the essential, as a return to the sources, to the first love of one time so that it will become again a *passion*, a personal search for God in the light of His Word. On-going or permanent formation has already helped in the formation of mature, evangelical and fraternal

communities, These religious are capable of responding to the challenges of the new culture, protecting themselves from the false myths or gods, such as excessive activism, which draws the person away from what is essential and making one forget that the work we carry out is the work of God and not ours.

During these years within several religious Movements present in Korea new groups have been formed which work for the promotion of women. Besides, within the Institutes, a vocabulary that will help to understand and share the concept of sexuality and also of chastity – without considering it a taboo as in the past - is growing and developing in a more open and sincere way. In this sphere there are always more persons needed who are prepared to accompany and assist the religious men and women on the way to live and to choose celibacy freely, helping them to commit themselves and to live consecrated virginity in a healthy and balanced way. Consecrated virginity freely chosen is a sign of the Kingdom. It is the announcement of the *pureness* of the life to come toward which all tend.

Virginity is a gift in the service of the fraternity.

As a Franciscan Sister, I would like to conclude my reflection joining the virtue and the vow of chastity in the context of fraternal life. This virtue leads us to be attentive to the management of our emotional and relational world; it reminds us of the importance of educating our heart in relation to others. Our present society invites us to challenge individualism by intensifying our encounters and our relationships. Therefore, it is fundamental to have an attentive vigilance on our interior world, as well as to be attentive to that which our eyes see, for example the use of mass-media,

since this can be a *door* through which we permit the world to enter within us.

Saint Francis in Chapter IX of the Rnb, affirms that chastity is a love which is lived above all, within the fraternity. “It is with trust that one manifests to the other his own need, so that the other one may find the things which are necessary and will give them to him. And each one loves and nourishes his brother as the mother loves and nourishes her own son, in those things in which God will give him his grace” (FF 32).

The fraternity is the place where fraternal love is experienced and grows. The fraternity is also the place in which love is lived concretely in life and in relationships. The love of Saint Francis is a universal love, which comes from God, who is loved above all things, and reaches first the fraternity and then each person, to the point that it extends to all creatures that inhabit the whole world. For Francis there were no limitations to this love.

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How the vow of chastity is understood in an African Culture and how it can be understood as a challenge for young men and women, so as to become a disturbing presence in our world today

Sr. Basil Nzimande FSF

INTRODUCTION:

The term “Vow of Chastity” is expressed in different terms by various authors. These terms are “Vow of Consecrated Chastity”, “Celibate Chastity”, “Consecrated Celibacy”, “Religious Celibacy”, and “Religious Chastity”. In this presentation these terms will be used interchangeably.

Consecrated Celibacy, chosen and lived in the context of Christian Faith, will have meaning and value as a Gospel value. It had been acknowledged by Post-African Synod (1994) that consecrated celibacy is the only vow that has been constant in all forms of religious life throughout history. Chastity is for all Christians but only a few are called to live celibate chastity.¹ Celibacy has received a lot of attention in recent times, writes Podimattan in his book “Consecrated Chastity revised (2006), it is affirmed and denounced, lauded and denigrated in both secular and religious press.²

In this article an attempt will be made to look at how the vow of Chastity is understood in an African context and to pick up some signs that render some hopeful insights into living this vow in our world today thus becoming a disturbing presence. It has become apparent that even today whenever some people embrace religious chastity, the world is disturbed. Is it not what happened when St. Francis and St. Clare embraced consecrated chastity, and of course poverty

and obedience? And Francis called this life a life of penance. Indeed a radical life. Bishop of Assisi Mons Domenico Sorrentino in his opening ritual homily during IFC-TOR General Assembly 2009 put it clearly: The radicalism of the life of St. Francis cannot be understood if we do not start from this. Christ was everything for St. Francis and St. Clare. Francis chose to be a disturbing presence, because he chose Christ.³

St. Francis and St. Clare grew and lived in a different culture and world view but they followed radically the life of the Gospel. This encourages us to look at our own cultures today with a view to look at new ways of living religious life in a radical way in this the 21st century. The focus of this presentation will be on African perspective and a reference to authors who have lived and worked in Africa and some of whom were born on African soil.

1. African perspective and consecrated chastity

Alyward Shorter in his book “Celibacy and African culture” (2003) points out that: There is no human culture in the world in which celibacy is a norm. This is as true of the other cultures of traditional Africa as it is of the modern western world...”⁴ Since consecrated celibacy excludes marriage and child bearing, what is the African view of marriage and procreation?

1.1 In Africa the most central value is marriage and procreation which is important for transmission of life and to preserve the name of a clan. For this reason boys are more preferable than girls because the latter may get married and then belongs to another clan. Whereas the boy will bear the name of the clan. “A man or a woman is

expected to bring life, to generate children biologically. If a woman is barren, she is not well accepted by her own kin's people, some even suffer consequences thereof. Women are blamed when marriages are childless"⁵ Therefore in an African society the social institution of marriage and family are for the promotion of the procreation of children.

Another value which was and still is part of social structure in Africa is Polygamy. In some parts of Africa a man can have more than one wife and multiple love affairs with other women. The woman is bound to one husband, who alone had or has sexual access to her. A man however, could have legitimate sexual access to more than one woman in polygamous marriage... A man might even justify extra marital sexual activity as preparatory to acquiring another wife.⁶

In the light of the above it becomes clear that consecrated celibacy and chastity are not in line with the African traditional way of thinking.

Sr. Caroline Chiogau quoted in Kiazuki's *Consecrated life in Bantu Africa* (2007) says "Of the three vows, celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven is the one that profoundly connects our lives as consecrated persons with the Lord. However it is also the one that poses major problems for our families and for our people."⁷

Again Paolo Archiati quoted in Kiazuki points out that ... the vow of Chastity ...represents a choice that is often difficult to understand.⁸ The

concept of celibate chastity is countercultural to many central values in Africa. However, in Africa the practice of sexual abstinence and virginity is known, not as a value but as a temporary act that can be exercised for a limited time in case of a certain ritual.

- 1.2 Virginity and African life view - In African (Bantu) philosophy maternal fertility is viewed as “precious gift of God and the ancestors offered to the African woman and her people, is a sign of God’s blessing, a sign of the presence of the ancestors, and the assurance of the survival of the clan. It is only through procreation that the individual becomes a person.”⁹

Some authors like Marie quoted in Kiazuki poses a question whether virginity may exist at all (that is, as a value) in a culture that is so eager for material fertility.¹⁰

Matungulu Otene quoted in Kiazuki, “insists that in the Bantu world, continence was rigorously practiced at certain moments in life. It was a question of periodic continence. Older people understood that through continence they could possess the vital force, a source of life and of human growth. Even today continence is practised with the aim of safeguarding and strengthening the life that comes from God and the ancestors. This periodic continence is practiced out of love for life and not for its own sake. Therefore periodic continence is not life-long celibacy.”¹¹

Virginity exists in the traditions of many African tribes: premarital virginity is valued by many African tribes, even if they do not all accord it the same value. In the rites of initiation into cult of certain divinities, the adepts must observe many taboos, among them, abstinence from sexual relations.¹²

Otene in Kiazuki, says that the observance of continence and the practice thereof does not lead to the celibacy proposed by the Gospel. He argues that no people in the world live celibacy from the standpoint proposed by the New Testament.”¹³

Rabemahafaly in Kiazuki also argues that this practice of life-long celibacy was something new and unheard of among African cultures. “Choosing to remain celibate for the whole of one’s life was something strange, if not completely alien to African culture.”¹⁴

Sr. Caroline Chiogou supports this statement by Rabemahafaly by relating her firsthand experience that “African men and women are not considered to be truly adult and “persons” until they have brought new life into the world. She says that some African mothers complain: For this very reason in some families the religious sister is rejected and insulted. I remember the complaints of one mother who begged her daughter to leave religious life; when the daughter decided to persevere, the mother rejected her. Another woman asked her daughter to leave her at least one child before

her final consecration. One young girl who entered religious life was treated as a criminal by a friend of hers.¹⁵

What is the possibility of inculturating consecrated celibacy in the face of these facts and many others? Rabemahafaly quoted in Kiazuki writes: The possibility of inculturating consecrated celibacy seems limited, if not downright impossible.¹⁶

However Otene again in Kiazuki says that he recognizes the dilemma and the challenge but says he does not agree with the negative criticism from some quarters that celibacy is more difficult for young Africans than for young Europeans.”¹⁷

He continues to say that for him “Celibacy is rooted in faith in the living Christ; it is an element that pervades the faith of the one who feels called.

- 2. Inculturation of consecrated celibacy/chastity in Africa:** As Religious Life was only introduced to sub-Saharan Africa in the 19TH century, it is difficult to discern what in religious consecration belongs to the Theology of Vows as interpreted from the Scriptures, and what belongs to Western culture and tradition because both were given to Africa without distinction. Although the Africans enthusiastically accepted this package , it has posed great challenges to African values and lifestyle. (Sr. Anne Wasike) Hence the need to inculturate religious life in Africa today.

2.1 So far it has become clear that celibacy as a gospel value is still countercultural in Africa. Kiazuki in his reflection asks relevant questions: “How is one to situate consecrated celibacy in an Africa yearning for fruitfulness? Or, how is one to express it positively in the African context, where fertility is highly prized and where a woman is not fulfilled except as a wife and mother? How and in what form chastity may become a source of fulfillment and fruitfulness for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, and not a frustrating deprivation.....?”¹⁸ Africa and its values and traditions have been strongly influenced by globalization in the modern world. Mobility, poverty, urbanisation and taking refuge in other countries have adversely affected African way of life. Teenage pregnancy, prostitution and abortion are becoming part of life of our youth in cities and rural areas. African values like family life and marriage are threatened.

“The challenge of Inculturation in Africa consists in ensuring that the followers of Christ will ever more fully assimilate the Gospel message, while remaining faithful to all authentic African values.”¹⁹

“Religious life in Africa should attempt to adopt the traditions and values that will help young religious to appreciate their African heritage”²⁰

To provide firm foundations for an authentic Inculturation it is important, therefore, that Centers of research should be established to see

how the authentic religious and human values can contribute to a genuinely African form of religious life.²¹

3. Towards understanding and accepting consecrated chastity as a value in Africa

3.1 The underlying question so far seems to be that if consecrated chastity is so countercultural for African way of life, how come that many young Africans are still attracted to this call even today?

Lumbala quoted in Kiazuki says: even if all the customs relating to a certain continence and virginity cannot be compared to the virginity of religious life, all the same they help us to understand how chastity of religious may be grasped and accepted by Bantu people”²²

Another aspect that is proposed or put forward by Archiati quoted in Kiazuki is very relevant as a starting point for understanding of consecrated celibacy by Africans: “For the renunciation of physical fatherhood and motherhood to be seen as a value, what impels one to make this renunciation must be something greater, something more important, but the beauty of this “something greater” is not always clear.”²³

For Francis and Clare God was something great and beautiful worthy of all praise and honour. Therefore to renounce everything for the sake of this something greater is a value one can aspire to. With this approach to our youth, a message can come across to our people in Africa if we

look at Francis and Clare who became a disturbing presence in their time and remain so. Mveng quoted in Kiazuki also believes that consecrated chastity is present as a value in African tradition, its purpose is to respond to certain needs of the clan or tribe.”²⁴

“Sexual abstinence plays a large role in the African outlook also. For instance... when the ancestors or the divine is approached in a special way, people will refrain from sexual contact, so that they can approach the spiritual world empty of sexual power. Whenever the spiritual world is to be mediated in a special way, therefore people refrain from physical sex. Healers also will live in a more ascetical way than others and have only a single wife. So, in Africa, there is a profound respect for sexuality and for sexual abstinence”.²⁵ It goes without saying that in this case we have a ground on which to build a better understanding of consecrated chastity.

As much as we Africans like to remain faithful to our authentic African values, but when it comes to consecrated celibacy, a countercultural Gospel value, it seems we are challenged to constantly live this vow faithfully amongst our people and to make a break-through so that our people will gradually understand the life of celibate chastity and what it entails. In our congregation, a local one, when founded in 1922 many young women suffered for embracing religious chastity because they were a disturbing presence among their own people. They

remained faithful to Christ who they believed called them.

St. Francis and St. Clare were born into the century of commercial revolution. They became a disturbing presence among their own people. They lived the Holy Gospel values that changed the lives of many despite some cultural and traditional ways of lifestyles of their own people. St. Clare refused to marry and opted for celibate chastity, St. Francis renounced the riches and embraced the poverty of Christ. "For St. Francis, life according to the Holy Gospel is Jesus Christ."²⁶

The Synod on Consecrated life has emphasized the need to inculturate religious life in any given cultural context so that the religious persons discern the real values of the given culture and the best way of accepting these values and perfecting them with the help of their own Charism."²⁷ We are challenged by the Synod as women and men religious to demonstrate by our lives, new cultural models of being Christians and religious in our given cultural contexts. And the intrinsic element of religious vocation is consecrated celibacy. The Saints who have lived religious chastity in the past opened new paths to the people of their generations and proposed new cultural models as did St. Francis and St. Clare who were innovative and became a disturbing presence.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion it can be understood that Consecrated Chastity as a Gospel value is countercultural and it calls for study of cultures and research to be made so as to understand this vow better.

This poses a challenge to review a theology of Religious life, Moral theology and integrating these with studies on Sexuality as this is being studied and better understood more than earlier writings on these subjects.

In Africa there is a challenge to do research and study of African philosophy and theology to throw light on the theory and living of religious life in our times.

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¹ The African Synod, Post-Synodal Special Assembly – a step forward, Pauline Publications, Tangaza, Kenya, 1995, pp 9 -63.

² PODIMATTAM FELIX, Consecrated Chastity Revisited, Media House, DELHI, 2006.

³ PROPOSITUM Becoming a disturbing Presence in Today's world: Christ through Francis, Clare and ME, General Assembly, 2009, Italia,16-22 May 2009, Vol. 12. no.1 Sept. 2009.

⁴ SHORTER ALYWARD, Celibacy and African Culture, Pauline Publications, Nairobi, Kenya 1998, pp 16 – 21.

⁵ See SHORTER ALYWARD, above

⁶ same as above

⁷ KIAZUKI VINCENTE CARLOS, Consecrated Life in Bantu Africa, Pauline, Publications Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, 2007, pp 149 153.

⁸ See KIAZUKI as above

⁹ See KIAZUKI as above

¹⁰ See KIAZUKI as above

¹¹ See KIAZUKI as above

¹² See KIAZUKI as above

¹³ See KIAZUKI as above

¹⁴ See KIAZUKI as above

¹⁵ See KIAZUKI as above

¹⁶ See KIAZUKI as above

¹⁷ See KIAZUKI as above

¹⁸ See KIAZUKI as above

¹⁹ BAUR JOHN, 2000 years of Christianity in Africa: an African Church History, Pauline Publications, 2nd Edition, Limuru, Kenya, 2009.

²⁰ See The African Synod, same as above

²¹ See KIAZUKI, as above

²² See KIAZUKI, as above

²³ See KIAZUKI, as above

²⁴ See KIAZUKI, as above

²⁵ See KIAZUKI, as above

²⁶ HORGAN THADDEUS, The CORD, A Franciscan Spiritual Review, Vol. 32 . no.9, October 1982

²⁷ WASIKE ANNA NASIMIYU, Inculturation and Millenium Trends in Consecrated Life, unpublished work, Kenya.