

Psychosexual Integration and Celibate Maturity: Perspectives in the Context of Major Seminary Formation Today

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Abstract

Human sexuality is a fundamental God-given gift to experience and share the love in its fullness to the creator and all the creatures. Formation for celibate life needs to be fully aware of this area of human experience and to help students to integrate their sexuality into a wholesome and healthy celibate religious life. To celebrate a happy celibate life we must understand and embrace the sacred dimension of sexuality, the gift of God. The present article focuses on psychosexual integration and celibate maturity, its meaning, and depth, the challenges the church faces in the present world, and suggestions to reach celibate maturity from the perspective of seminary formation.

Keywords: Psychosexual Integration, Celibate Maturity, Seminary Formation

Introduction

Human sexuality is a fundamental God-given gift to experience and share the love in its fullness to the creator and all the creatures, therefore psychosexual integration and celibate maturity, help a person to celebrate the consecrated life in wholeness and holiness in the Church. Psychosexual integration is a process that lasts all through our life. It begins in the womb and continues till we die. One advantage of psychosexual integration being a lifelong process is that even if we are

wounded or traumatized along the way, we can get healed and continue the journey in healthy ways. Psychosexual integration and celibate maturity help us to build up genuine and gentle relationships according to the status of our life. It is important that candidates to the priesthood need to have clear notions about sexuality, sexual problems, and ways of handling them. Priestly formation programs have to give greater importance to this area of priestly living and service. When we know that the core dynamism of our sexuality is the mystery of love, we will discover its fullness in the life of Jesus.

Formation to the priesthood and religious life need to include an honest and realistic treatment of all aspects of sexuality and celibacy. Formation for celibate life needs to be fully aware of this area of human experience and to help students to integrate their sexuality into a wholesome and healthy celibate religious life. Celibacy is not a rejection or denial of our sexuality rather it is a way of living our sexuality in a unique way. Sexuality is rooted in a deep human need for others and is the source of compassion and friendship. ‘Genitality’ is just one aspect of sexuality. The capacity for intimacy is an important measure of a person’s human and emotional maturity. Celibate intimacy is a blessing and implies sharing in a deep friendship without being married and without violating chastity physically or psychologically. Healthy celibate intimacy is a blessing that depends on many supporting factors in a person’s personality. It requires a capacity to believe in the honesty and integrity of others and a readiness to trust the other and to share one’s experiences. This implies healthy self-esteem and a capacity for empathy.

Psychosexual Integration: A Call to Wholeness and Holiness with the Signs of Time

The “Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV) of St. John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy, and Religious on the formation of priests in the circumstances of the present day, opened a new and most relevant area of attention in the priestly and religious formation” (John Paul II, 1992). The four pillars of priestly formation according to PDV are Human formation, Intellectual formation, Spiritual formation, and Pastoral formation. These four dimensions of priestly formation though they are distinct are always in mutual dialogue with each other and each of them contributes to the realization of the other dimensions. Having said to that, PDV no. 43 adds, “The whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked human

formation” (John Paul II, 1992). The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, also underscores the importance of the maturation of the personality of the priest, since the “divine call engages and involves the concrete human person” (Congregation for the Clergy, 2016).

Understanding the mind of the Church the present-day priestly and religious formation has a greater focus on human formation by making use of the contributions of sciences like psychology, neurology, and other human sciences. “These sciences will explain more systematically the depth and ramification of human sexuality, a deep dimension of being human, a dimension that affects the growth of the entire personality” (Aykara,2017). For a healthy and valid human formation, the candidates should be trained systematically and professionally to understand and embrace the sacred dimension of sexuality, the gift of God. Aykara points out that “Deep down at the heart of sexuality there is a divine dimension, the power and the presence of the divine that will make our life an attractive witness, the most eloquent preaching of the priest as a shepherd” (Aykara,2017). Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* declared, “In the design of God, every man is called upon to develop and fulfill himself, for life is a vocation, endowed with intelligence and freedom, he is responsible for his fulfillment as for his salvation”(Paul VI, 1967).

According to Parappully psychosexual integration is understood as “the progressive combining of all the elements that make up the mental, emotional and sexual dimensions of our life so that at every stage of life we feel, think and act as mature persons”(Ferder&Heagle, 2001). It also refers to “the dynamic interplay of sexual energies, feelings, experiences, circumstances, stages of life, tasks to be accomplished at each stage of life, awareness and decisions that lead us toward mature and loving relationships” (Ferder &Heagle, 2001, p. 38). In our understanding, we can put it together as the integration of the powerful, God-given gift of sexuality into one’s life choices in a happy, loving, and productive way.

Psychosexual Integration in Celibate Maturity

“Psychosexual integration in celibate maturity refers to the highest level of psychosexual development wherein an individual has completed the psychosexual developmental tasks” (Sperry, 2003, p. 231). It is also part of a wider process of human maturity. It involves a gradual acceptance and embracing of our unique sexuality and sexual identity.

“One of the most significant variables in sexual maturation is self-esteem. How we see ourselves has a great impact on what we bring to our relationships and our religious communities” (Bruess, p. 34). “Most importantly, psychosexual integration is reflected in our capacity for healthy relationships and incapacity for intimacy and communion, this implies that we have a growing capacity to relate in more honest and conscious ways with self, with others and with God” (McClone, 2009, p. 57).

Our experience of sex, our awareness of sexuality, our attitude toward close relationships, all shape our sense of self. To mature sexually is to become more confident and more comfortable with the ways that sex, sexuality, and intimacy are part of our life. D’Sa states that “Signs of celibate maturity can be understood as the ability to acknowledge and accept one’s sexuality without denial and guilt” (D’Sa, 2012). Celibate maturity also can be understood as the ability to pursue intimacy without motivation to the genital union. It also means love for humanity not just for particular persons and friends.

The Celebration of Consecrated Life through Celibate Chastity and Maturity in the Church

During an interview with reporters on a flight returning from the Holy Land, Pope Francis responded to a question about the possibility of admitting married men to the candidacy for the priesthood in the Catholic Church: “The Catholic Church has married priests in the Eastern rites. Celibacy is not a dogma of faith; it is a rule of life that I appreciate a great deal and I believe it is a gift for the Church. The door is always open given that it is not a dogma of faith” (Henneberger, 2014). Indeed, today there is a widespread discussion in the world and the Catholic Church regarding priestly celibacy, particularly with reference to its mandatory character and usefulness in the Catholic Church. Seline opines that “Issues such as the lack of priestly vocations, the possible benefits of married Catholic priests, and the ecumenical reality of Protestant denominations with married ministers all seem to call into question the relevance of this centuries-old tradition” (Selin, 2016). These issues highlight the widespread interest in priestly celibacy and underline its distinctiveness as a fundamental element in the history and spirituality of the ministerial priesthood.

On the other hand, the decree of Vatican II on the ministry and life of priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, presented a distinct theology of

priestly celibacy that was broadly organized around a threefold scheme that highlighted its Christological, ecclesiological, and eschatological dimensions. Two years later, Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical letter, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, used the threefold dimension to develop further the reasons for the discipline of mandatory priestly celibacy in the Latin Church. His use of the ecclesiological dimension was especially helpful in inspiring some of the more creative developments in subsequent magisterial teachings. Finally, John Paul II (1992), in the apostolic exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, employed the threefold dimension in order to highlight the pastoral fruitfulness of priestly celibacy.

Henri Nouwen, one of the most widely read spiritual writers of our times and a celibate priest himself, liked Thomas Aquinas's simple definition of celibacy *vacare Deo*, a vacancy for God. "To be celibate means to be empty for God, to be free and open for his presence, to be available for his service" (Mannath, 2012). Nouwen insisted however that this "being empty for God" is not a special privilege of some people; he saw it. Rather, as an essential aspect of all forms of the Christian life. Celibates and married people are a support for each other. Celibacy is much more than mere sexual abstinence. Not being married and not being involved in a sexual relationship does not constitute a celibate life. Celibacy is an openness to God of which sexual abstinence is only one of its manifestations. Celibacy is a lifestyle in which we try to witness to the priority of God in all relationships. This involves every part of our life.

For biblical scholar Schneiders (1986), whose writings on religious life are well known "consecrated celibacy is the freely chosen response to a personally discerned vocation to charismatically grounded religiously motivated, sexually abstinent, lifelong commitment to Christ that is externally symbolized by remaining unmarried."

Consecrated celibacy involves, first of all, a free choice to remain unmarried for the whole of one's life to make it a state of life. Consecrated celibacy is the defining characteristic of religious life as a public lifestyle in the Church. "It is embraced for religious and supernatural motive, not out of necessity, misfortune, or coercion" (Thadathil, 1999, p. 71).

Major Seminary Formation for Celibate Chastity Today

According to McGovern (1998, p. 139), “The nurturing of a vocation to the priesthood is essentially a work of grace.” But the context in which such a call comes to fruition is normally the environment of a Christian family where the faith is lived and learned. “An integral part of this formation is an education in the Christian meaning of chastity and human sexuality” (McGovern, 1998, p. 139). It is from this perspective that vocation to celibacy can make sense and take root. The document of the Pontifical Council for the Family is a very helpful contribution to this important task of sex education. It offers answers to fundamental questions a Christian society should be asking itself: “What type of young persons do we want to form for tomorrow? What is the connection between love, sexuality, and self-giving? Why is celibacy a valid and reasonable response to one’s sexuality?” (The Pontifical Counsel for the Family, 1996, p. 42). Many years before being elected to the papacy, John Paul II wrote about the need to restore the good name of the virtue of chastity, which he says, is ‘resented’ because of a distorted sense of values” (Wojtyla, 1981, p. 141). John Paul II, in his document on the Christian Family, *Familiaris Consortio* defines very clearly that, “For a Christian, sex education is fundamentally formation in the virtue of chastity and that, consequently, the Church is firmly opposed to sex education as information dissociated from moral principles” (John Paul II, 1981). The document of the Pontifical Council for the family provides a systematic development of the principles laid down by *Familiaris Consortio*. “Chastity has been aptly described as ‘the spiritual energy capable of defending love from the perils of selfishness and aggressiveness and able to advance it towards its full realization’” (John Paul II, 1981).

Formation in chastity is not an isolated programme but one which must be integrated into formation in other virtues such as generosity, fortitude, the spirit of sacrifice, humility and perseverance. As a consequence, it makes for an integrated personality with self-respect and a corresponding respect for the dignity of others. As human sexuality points out: “the very fact we all are called to holiness, as the second Vatican Council teaches, make it easier to understand that everyone can be in situations where the heroic act of virtues are indispensable, whether in celibate life or marriage and that in fact in one way or another this happens to everyone for shorter or longer period” (The Pontifical Counsel for the Family, 1996, p. 19). “Chastity

is not an isolated virtue. Consequently, because sexuality is such an important good, it needs to be protected by the nurturing of other virtues such as modesty, temperance, a spirit of service, respect or self and others” (McGovern, 1998). It is in the home, too that the children learn how to reject the pressures of materialism and consumerism by means of formation in generosity and self-sacrifice. To achieve effective formation in chastity, it is necessary to challenge young people with the full implications of their baptismal vocation. Celibacy is a call that is perennially valid, despite changing social and cultural conditions, because it is a gift freely given by the Holy Spirit to those whom he pleases. Responses to this gift can, of course, vary depending on the personal dispositions of those to whom it is offered and their ability to identify and appreciate it. A vocation is a way of learning to recognise oneself of gradually appropriating one’s own identity in the light of God’s grace and His will for each. It implies a recognition of life as a gift that has been allotted a particular purpose within the father’s providential plan. “The discovery of a vocation to celibacy is a dialogue with grace over a shorter or longer period. It does not impose itself but beckons one forward to be what God wants one to be. It is not in any way a form of self-estrangement, but is rather an exercise in self-fulfilment at the deepest, a definition of personal identity in the presence of God” (McGovern, 1998).

Exploration of the Challenges to Psychosexual Integration and the Encounters through Psychospiritual Interventions

There are several common problems that trouble candidates in the area of sexuality. Unless the candidates form an open and congruent approach to this problem it’s very difficult to attain a healthy psychosexual integration.

Masturbation

Masturbation is a source of much perplexity, worry, and distress for priests, religious and candidates to the priesthood and religious life. “A disembodied spirituality which denigrates the beauty of the human body and the eroticism of sensuality and sexuality can make candidates more vulnerable to the enticement of autoeroticism” (Kraft, 1982, p. 39). “To view masturbation as a challenge for spiritual growth, we must listen and learn from the uncomfortable feelings that often underline and motivate masturbation” (Parappully,2012). Formators must be freed of sexual inhibitions to accept and help the candidates in their sexual

struggles. Formators need to have compassion not condemnation, appreciate the person's sincerity, do not make the person feel bad about having spoken. Help the candidate to explore the source of stress and tension, to identify and avoid a certain location and situation, to engage in meaningful activity. "A candidate also needs to have an intrinsically arrived at the meaning for his celibate commitment, such meaning will motivate the candidate to exercise the vigilance and temperance necessary to maintain celibate chastity." Those who have cerebral lives, with little involvement in bodily activities such as play, manual work, exercise or relaxation, who are uncomfortable in relating to others and sharing affective feelings and who are workaholic are more vulnerable to the lure of masturbation as a tension reduction mechanism and means of self-soothing. Sexual fantasies become morally wrong when they reflect a persistent pattern of using people or violating relationships. On the other hand healthy sexual fantasies are normal and necessary part of psychosexual growth. They are not "impure thoughts". Rather they are the creative way in which our imagination prepares us for mature love.

Harvey wrote, "Masturbation can become so much a part of one's pattern of behaviour that its elimination will leave a deep experiential void, which must be filled in some way. Experience of real relationships with God in prayer, and with other persons in friendship will fill that void." (Harvey, 1993, p. 45). "The habit or compulsion of masturbation, often associated with the use of internet pornography, is a serious problem that has often been neglected in the pastoral ministry of the Church" (Kleponis, 2012, p. 13).

In order to celebrate a happy celibate life we must understand and embrace the sacred dimension of sexuality, the gift of God. The moral danger in masturbation is that it may stunt one's growth inter subjectively and heterosexually. "It can silence the urging of the spirit that invites a person to loving relationship and abort the opportunity for growth and this is the real sin in masturbation" (Kelsey, M., & Kelsey, 1986, p. 124). "Persons who are facing the problem of masturbation should be helped out to face this problem with courage and confidence and determination and invite the person to the love and forgiveness of God the father to come out of masturbation and grow to sexual maturity and integrity" (Kochuthara, 2019, p. 70).

Homosexuality

Homosexuality has been generally understood as sexual activity or behaviour between members of the same sex. Homosexuality includes homosexual orientation and homosexual behaviour. Homosexual orientation conditions an individual's way of satisfying their deep felt need for love, attachment and intimacy. "Persons generally express their homosexual orientation through their behaviours with others." (Kankarathinam&Parappully, 2012).

In religious and priestly formation, it is essential to focus on the aspect of "affective maturity," that is, the ability to handle emotions well and to maintain healthy and appropriate relationships with both men and women. A formator should be vigilant to the psychological blocks of the formees and guide them, to grow towards stable, emotional, psychological, and spiritual maturity. If the candidates are identified as having a homosexual orientation, formators and spiritual directors should assist and guide the individuals to look into these issues and take a comfortable stand toward it. However, homosexually oriented candidates, as also professed religious, do face greater challenge than heterosexually oriented candidates in managing their sexual impulses because formation takes place and later religious life is lived in same sex communities. In such communities candidates with a homosexual orientation or tendency may sometimes harass their peers and pressure them to enter into a homosexual relationship (Parappully, 2012, p. 222). When this is not addressed during formation years, these individuals can continue to exhibit such harassment and demand forced sexual relationships even as professed religious.

The challenge for the formator here is not to discriminate, condemn, or judge the formees, but help them to work through their confusions, and find clarity regarding their orientation. Some candidates may require professional counselling, psychotherapy or spiritual direction to sort out their confusion and learn to cop appropriately and in healthy ways with their inclinations and impulses (Parappully, 2012, p. 223).

David Hawkins would say that "the presence of homosexuality does not appear to be a matter of choice but the expression of it can be a matter of choice" (Kankarathinam & Parappully, 2012, p. 240). Homosexuals are to be treated as brothers and sisters with similar dignity and rights as heterosexuals (Samprickal, 2014, p. 78);but the assumption that the sexual behaviour of the homosexual person is totally compulsive, natural and acquired and therefore inculpable is

not an acceptable view. Homosexuality is a very complex phenomenon and its causes are still not perfectly definable. The total person is more encompassing than the sexual orientation or the sexual act. Church while not approving homosexuality embraces homosexuals and does not consider them responsible for their condition.

Pornography

Sexual intimacy and the pleasure that derives from true love are gifts from God and should remain personal and private, enjoyed within the sacred bond of marriage alone. Such intimacy should not be put on display or be watched by any other person, even if that person is one's spouse. Nor should the human body be unveiled or treated in a way that objectifies it sexually and reduces it to an erotic stimulant. John Paul II (1981) says "The traditional teaching that pornography is an offense against chastity because by its very nature it denies the genuine meaning of individuals to love and to share in the creative work of God through responsible procreation, by reducing the body to an instrument for the gratification of senses" (p. 283).

"Pornography is an 'electronic tsunami', an evil because it debases the priceless worth and dignity of each human being and the gift of human sexuality given by God who shares his loving, creative power with us" (Wilson, 2014, p. 78). In recent years especially since the past ten years, pornography on the Internet has visually exploded in volume and is now the leading source of pornographic materials easily available worldwide. Many people deny or rationalize the use of porn, saying: it is only entertainment, what is the harm in looking at pictures or videos? In reality and truth, pornography is a problem. It is a personal problem for many and a cultural problem for all. "The astounding size of the pornography industry, its influence upon the media and the acceleration of technology, paired with the accessibility, anonymity, and affordability contribute to its increasing impact upon people and culture" (Wilson, 2014, p. 78). Though there are no statistics available to pinpoint the percentage of priests and seminarians who have accessed Internet pornography, there is a strong awareness of the reality that pornography is one of the important issues to be dealt with by the seminarians and priests. "It looks evident that the seminarians and priests use internet pornography for the same reasons as the general population does, especially the formeres from dysfunctional families, and victims of psychological wounds and traumas inflicted by such abuse" (Tellis, 2013, p. 37).

Formees in the religious houses and seminaries are coming with experiences shaped by a technology-steeped society, a technology that is having a very negative impact on family bonding. For example, mobile use, internet chatting and television viewing leave little time for family meals and bonding. Many values, including spiritual, that are normally transmitted through family interactions are not being communicated. It is very important for formators to be aware of this changed reality. Initial formation programs, for example, have to begin with the inculcation of basic human and Christian values, that are not passed on to them by parents and family. “Greater attention has to be given today to the human formation of candidates in regard to the use of the electronic media. Formators need to give appropriate orientation to the formees and monitor their use of the internet to help them avoid getting hooked on to it” (Tellis, 2013, p. 37).

It is important that the formation team themselves have an integral psychosexual formation necessary to fulfil this responsibility adequately. Formators need to help formees develop trust and feel accepted and provide them sufficient freedom and guidance to explore and come to terms with the here-and-now existential realities that formees encounter and often struggle with.

Conclusion

“True joy does not come from things or from possessing, It is born from the encounter, from the relationship with others, it is born from feeling accepted, understood and loved, and from accepting, from understanding and from loving; and this is not because of a passing fancy but because the other is a person.” Said by Pope Francis while addressing a group of seminarians and novices on 6 July 2013 at Paul VI audience hall in Rome.

We live in an age wherein there is a greater acknowledgement of the role of integrated sexuality in the development of a healthy personality. This is true within the Church as well. There is greater awareness within the Church of the problems that many candidates to the priesthood and priests themselves face with their sexual and spiritual integration.

Sexual problems can be best understood and treated when considered within a global understanding of a person’s psychological and spiritual functioning, as well as his personal and familial history. Rather than addressing specific problems, it is very important that helpers explore with the candidate the deeper underlying dynamics that give rise to

these problems. One major challenge for helpers is to be the kind of persons whom the candidate can experience as trustworthy and competent and who can provide the kind of interpersonal environment in which the candidate feels free to explore together aspects of himself that he usually dreads to acknowledge or reveal. Hence priests and candidates to the priesthood must have clear notions about sexuality, sexual problems, and ways of handling them to enhance a healthy human formation through psychosexual integration.

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