

# LOVING

## AND TEACHING OTHERS TO LOVE

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### THE FORMATION OF AFFECTIVITY IN PRIESTLY LIFE

Francisco Insa & Dale Parker (eds.)







Loving and  
Teaching Others to Love  
The Formation of Affectivity in Priestly Life

Francisco Insa & Dale Parker (eds.)

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*What do we need priests for? We need them, quite simply, because we need God.*

*[...] the priest's task is to teach people to love. To love love and to teach them to love. For, indeed, we must learn it. After all, love does not consist only in the first great moment of being swept away. Love consists precisely in the patience of accepting one another, of becoming ever close to one another from within. It consists in the fidelity of putting up with one another; it consists in walking together. Love, like the Gospel, is not sugar water, not comfortable, but, rather, a great challenge, and, for this very reason, the purification and transformation and healing of our life, which leads us into the big picture.*

*Teaching and learning love. This is the real task of someone who speaks about God. And this is what we need most, for if we do not become loving in the right way, we separate ourselves from God and from ourselves, and life becomes dark and pointless.*

*J. RATZINGER, Homily on the occasion of the Fortieth Priestly Jubilee of Monsignor Franz Niegel (Unterwossen, 1994), in J. RATZINGER/BENEDICT XVI, *Teaching and Learning the Love of God. Being a Priest Today*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco (CA) 2017, pp. 315.317-318.*



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# CHRISTIAN PATERNITY, MATURE FRUIT OF A CHASTE LIFE

S.E.R. Mons. Massimo Camisasca\*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Before we begin, I would like to clarify some terminology. When I talk about people that have dedicated themselves completely to God, I prefer the term virginity instead of chastity.<sup>1</sup> In fact, while the word chastity refers mainly to sexual continence, virginity refers to a way of loving that finds its roots in the way of life that Christ has revealed to us. This way, as I will show, implies continence as well, but it does not consist in the abolition of sexuality. Virginity is God's way of looking at the world, and is therefore the truest form of love, the fulfillment of affectivity. Therefore, to speak of virginity means to speak of affective maturity. For all men, and in particular for priests, affective maturity means learning to love people and things as God loves them, as a father. The link between virginity, affective maturity and fatherhood is thus revealed *in nuce*.

What are the thoughts that lie behind virginity and consecrated life in general? What explains them? My own great discovery is that virginity is not a way of life destined for the few. On the contrary, it's the life to which we are all destined. In my opinion, there has been a kind of alliance between the Church and the world to restrict, over the centuries, the scope of these terms. Virginity

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<sup>1</sup> To go deeper on the theme of "virginity", please consult: M. CAMISASCA, *La sfida della paternità. Riflessioni sul sacerdozio*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2003.

today indicates a way of life often ridiculed. Even the most well-intentioned of people consider it to be proper only to priests and nuns. It doesn't come across as fundamental to all human life. This is precisely the perspective in which I want to situate myself. One understands what virginity is as a specific form of life if one understands virginity as a form for all human life.

## 2. THE EMOTIONAL MATURITY OF JESUS

“Virginity” describes the total orientation of Jesus’ life to the Father. It’s the way Jesus looks at the world through his relationship with the Father, and *is* the relationship that Jesus had with the Father.<sup>2</sup> To enter into this bond means to enter into the mystery of the Trinity, something impossible for us. But here we perceive the dizzying heights of virginity. It identifies us on earth with the life of Jesus and makes us enter into the mystery of the Trinity, into the heart of God, into something eternal already in time. It makes our activities and relationships mysteriously indestructible, it communicates to us the certainty that they will not be lost in time. People saw the splendor of this certainty in Jesus’ look, words and actions. Virginity is the participation in the mentality, in the heart and in the gaze of Christ.

When we meditate on chapters 12-17 of the Gospel of John, we can see a double focus. Jesus is sent by the Father into the world and, at the same time, is one with him. He is the one sent. The Father has so loved the world that he has sent his Son, who came not to judge but to save. The Son communicates the things that the Father has told him; he does the things that the Father has entrusted to him; he does what pleases the Father, because he is one with him. The Son receives everything from the Father, transmits everything to his people and wants to restore all of them to the Father.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. L. GIUSSANI, *Si può vivere così?*, Rizzoli, Milano 1994<sup>2</sup>, pp. 118ff., 350ff.; IDEM., *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, Rizzoli, Milano 1996, p. 520.

The Son's virginity is therefore his being in total relationship with the Father – his gaze on men and things in the light of the Father. The passages of the Gospel that impress me the most are the ones about Providence (cf. Mt 6:25-34; Lk 12:22-34). Here Jesus' heart and gaze really appear: his divine capacity to see the fabric, the flower, the bird, with the Father's gaze, to refer everything to him. We can say that his heart is engaged in an adoration in which all men have a place. Jesus loved men in the Father and he loves each of us in the Father. His is not a divided love, but a single love. Our love is always somewhat imperfect and therefore disintegrating. Virginity is the way of the re-composition of love.

Virginity is finding everything in Jesus, just as he found everything in the Father. I don't like exclusive visions of love. I prefer an inclusive vision: not to love only God, but to love all things in him. Love for Jesus is not born of contempt for the things in life. On the contrary, it expands when we discover that love for the things of life finds its foundation in him alone. In Jesus we can find everything, and that is why he is the original and comprehensive source of love. I do not think that Jesus reproached Martha for what she was doing, but for what she was neglecting. Martha had not yet understood that her work for Jesus was to be founded on the contemplation of Jesus, on loving him above all else. Martha loved what she was doing for Jesus more than Jesus himself.

Jesus did not marry, and he asked the apostles to leave everything for him. There was no contempt for human affairs in him. He knew well that man was made in his image, and he loved every person. There was no negative consideration for women, as there was in the culture of his time (let us remember the examples of the Samaritan woman and the women who followed him). Jesus had no negative consideration of marriage. Not only did he begin his ministry with a marriage, but he wanted it to be the highest sign of the covenant between man and God. Jesus wanted everyone to see in him the preferential and total love for the Father. He asked the

apostles to live out virginity so that everyone would see in them the preferential and total love for Christ.

The foundation of virginity is, therefore, the relationship between Christ and the Father. This can only be understood from within the faith. A purely naturalistic view of life is not enough. Therefore, we should not be surprised by misunderstanding or a certain level of derision from the world, because the world lacks the tools to understand what has happened to us. How is it possible that what everyone would consider an ignominious defeat (not having a woman, not having sex) is something we consider luminous and which does not exclude the vocations of others?

Virginity is a way of life that cries out the name of Christ, that cries out that Christ is the only reason and the only possibility for a full life. It is prophecy, because he who lives it cries out to the world that the truth is Christ, cries out that Christ is everything, that Christ is the meaning of everything.<sup>3</sup>

People's difficulty understanding was already present among the apostles. What will we get for leaving everything? We should think carefully about Jesus' answer (cf. Mt 19:27-29; Mk 10:28-30). Jesus sees virginity not as a hundredfold enhancement of human experience. It is no diminution. It is important to enter into this message and become aware of it. Without the hundredfold experience our vocation is not possible. If we consider ourselves diminished men we will not have any light to give to those who are waiting for it.

Other men or women in the course of their lives, outside a faith context, may have had the intuition that it was convenient to be free: to dedicate themselves to a job, to a career, to a philanthropic task, etc. This has nothing to do with virginity. Virginity is being free for Christ, free to love him, to find our freedom in that love. In this way a source of self-gift opens up in us that would

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. IDEM, *Il tempo e il tempio*, Rizzoli, Milano 1995, pp. 21ff.

otherwise be impossible. From the preferential love for him and from his preferential love for us, we have the possibility of being with others, the poor, the needy, and those who do not know Jesus.

I have asked myself in my life, especially when I was young, whether it's possible to live without sexual relations. From the experience of my own life, I can affirm that it's possible. On this topic I would like to share some words from the great biologist Jérôme Lejeune: "As fundamental as it is (the future of the species depends on it), this biological function is the only one in which the lack of satisfaction does not lead to any pathology. The same cannot be said of hunger, thirst or the need to sleep. In celibacy the drive persists, always equally specialized, but the appetite becomes generalized. Being initially genital, it grows brilliantly, climbing the tree of life to the One who generates it."<sup>4</sup> The drive, even if it remains, becomes a unifying force with many people.

At the beginning of this first part I said that virginity implies a way of relating to people that God asks of everyone. The gaze and the thoughts of Christ are given to us in an initial but effective way in baptism. That is why every Christian is called to virginity. There is a virginity also in marriage in the same way that there is a nuptiality in virginity. Baptism is the moment when our life is rooted in the body of Christ, is put into relationship with him. Every Christian, whatever the specific form of his or her vocation, through baptism is grafted onto Jesus, who is the only meaning and value of a Christian's existence. Virginity is the work of the Spirit in us.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. LEJEUNE, "Coeli Beatus: osservazioni di un biologo", in AV.VV., *Solo per amore. Riflessioni sul celibato sacerdotale*, Edizioni Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo 1993, p. 82.



### 3. FROM EMOTIONAL MATURITY TO PATERNITY

#### *a) Affective Maturity with Oneself*

Virginity is the fulfillment of affectivity. The first area in which this is achieved is that of a new way of looking at oneself, at one's past, at one's present and at one's future. To achieve maturity it is necessary first of all to achieve a balanced relationship with our past. For example, it's important to arrive at an authentic judgment about the role of our parents in our life. There's no way to imagine a true present and future for one's life without reconciliation with the past, the entire past.

Consequently, virginity in relation to the self means first of all loving ourselves as we are, accepting the existence of limits, defects, and sins. I don't mean approving them, but I want to underline that accepting that an evil exists is the condition for changing and it's the beginning of freedom and of spiritual, psychic and even physical health. Virginity is freedom with respect to ourselves, that is, acceptance of ourselves, full possession of ourselves in order to be able to give ourselves totally. Here another link emerges between affective maturity and spiritual fatherhood. The essence of the priestly life is, in fact, a gift of oneself to Christ who is present: to proclaim Christ, to make him present in the sacraments, to enkindle in people the desire that Christ be known and loved.

Virginity in one's relationship with oneself is also the capacity to be independent of the judgment of others. How much time and how much serenity we lose through an exaggerated dependence on the judgment of others! It is not a question of being indifferent, but of paying attention to the true judgment of the one who has a passion for our life, of the one who knows and loves us, instead of being attentive to all the voices that circulate about us. The stature of our existence is defined by Christ.

In this sense, virginity with oneself also refers to the way in which one lives out one's daily tasks. This is a crucial question for

priests. If we are given a responsibility, we must accept it and live it out because it has been given to us. If, on the other hand, we are not given said responsibility, we shouldn't worry about it. We will have less to answer for before God.

Another aspect of this ability to be independent of the judgment of others concerns the scope of one's work. The inability to carry out the commitments of work with distance and balance denotes an immature emotional life. Often we have the need to feel confirmed by the success of our work. To achieve success we are pushed to sacrifice silence, prayer and relationships with our truest friends. We put ourselves continually at the mercy of everything that is asked of us in the workplace for fear of disappointing the expectations of those in charge. This is not a simple voluntarism: it is a much more serious issue, rooted in the inability to situate our affectivity in Christ. The Bible speaks of an enemy who "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). This roaring lion is sometimes our heart, which seeks something different from Christ to spend its emotional energies.

Whether it is a question of one's role in life or one's work, the great risk we can run is not being happy with the special love we have received from Christ, and instead carrying out certain activities or living in situations where we find emotional compensations that will only be superficial. All this leads to a considerable psychophysical wear and tear, because it leads one to always pursue something that is outside of oneself without ever being satisfied with what one has already received.

#### *b) Called to be Fathers in the Church*

As T.S. Eliot wrote, the Church exists to remind people that lust, money and war do not satiate the thirst of their hearts.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. T.S. ELIOT, *The Rock*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York 1934, Chorus VII.

Church has more functions than this, of course, but when people don't participate in her life or discover her as the bearer of a possibility of fulfillment, then they see in her only a source of exhortations, reproaches and intolerable prohibitions. What importance does the Church have for man? She is the place of true fatherhood and true motherhood, expressions of the maturity and fullness of the human being. Fatherhood and motherhood differ for physiological and psychological reasons, but in the primary sense they are equivalent, because they share the same generative and educational task. They are the supreme participation in the end for which we exist.

God is the one who generates and does not abandon; he is the one who brings us in and educates us. The first task of spiritual parenthood, therefore, is to educate. Christ has left this task above all to our Holy Mother the Church. She generates her children at the baptismal font, feeds them, educates them and supports them through the sacraments, catechesis and mutual support. Priests are servants of the fatherhood of God and the motherhood of the Church.

A father is one who is called to give something that he has received. This applies to fathers in the flesh as well as to fathers in the spirit. The former simply give something that they have received. Today this consideration is increasingly in crisis because of the attempt to identify man with God through genetic manipulation: one decides whether or not to have children, one chooses to have them in this state, with this gender, independent from a sexual relationship or beyond the relationship between a man and a woman. There is a growing attempt to put the fact of nature in parentheses: we are not the origin of life, we can only give something that we have received.

This consideration is certainly correct for the carnal father and mother. They are God's collaborators<sup>6</sup> in educational work as well,

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 307 and 2207.

to which they can contribute only to the extent of their own human maturity. The spiritual father is also a collaborator of God, because he communicates to others what he has received from the Church and from Christ.

Just as the role of physical fatherhood and motherhood culminates when the child leaves home, so spiritual fatherhood culminates when the one who has found Christ through us discovers him more and more as the full meaning of his own existence. Fr. Giussani tended to put the role of the spiritual father, or rather, of spiritual direction, in parentheses because he saw the risk of over-emphasizing the bond between person and person and thus falling into a negative personalism. In the case of the priest, the reference to the objectivity of the Church and of Christ is made through his ministry and above all through preaching. Just as Jesus said that the truth he preached did not come from him, but had been given to him, so the priest knows very well that the words he speaks have been put to his lips. He offers a wisdom that is not his own. This can be seen even more clearly in the sacraments.

Although our very ministry is an objective expression referring to the Church and to Christ, we ourselves are not saviors, but simply the intermediaries of Christ's work. Christ has entrusted his work of salvation to men. Each one of us has been called to be an effective mediator of that work through his voice, his temperament, his creativity. Christ acts through the men he chooses and takes all the risks of his choice, thus also taking on all our gifts, which are ultimately his own.

Christ sends us to gather men and women into a people that is his and not ours, but he does it through us. Therefore, not only must our talents, our sensitivity and our temperament not be put in brackets, but they are explicitly willed and chosen by Christ to be intermediaries of his choice. What is at stake here is the balance of the educator, his maturity: God calls the father with all that he is, but not so that the father can attract to himself. We must thank God for the gifts he gives us, gifts that are varied and different in

each person. But we must also be aware that he has granted these gifts for the benefit and the edification of the community, to build a house inhabited by God, as Claudel says in *Annunciation to Mary*.<sup>7</sup>

One of the fundamental tasks of a spiritual parent is to help the Christian find their original parent. Not only in the situation that this parent has drifted away from drink or violence, but also when the directee simply has no relationship with him.

The maturing of our relationship with the one who continually generates us to faith goes hand in hand with the rediscovery of the figure of our natural father. The more our personal faith matures in us, the more we discover the decisive importance of our natural father, the more we discover with shock that along with his limitations he is also great. A personality separated from one's natural father is an unstable and problematic personality. Where there is no reconciliation with one's own material roots there is no possibility of spiritual fruitfulness, even if our father and mother has thrown us out of the house or, as sometimes unfortunately happens, has told us that they no longer want to see us. If there is no forgiveness, there is no possibility of fecundity.

Given the enormous confusion that young people experience today with regard to father figures, we can only talk about these issues by referring to our personal experience: if they have never found a father, they have to discover him in us.

Paradoxically, today the figure of the father is exalted above all by those who live out their virginity. In an interesting article published in *Communio*, Granados points out that today there is a recovery of fatherhood precisely on the part of priests: "The priestly character is imprinted not only on the soul of the priest, but also on his corporeality. We have to remember once again that 'spiritual' (i.e., 'spiritual fatherhood') does not imply a lack of participation of the body. [...] a pure spirit, an angelic figure, is not

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. P. CLAUDEL, *The Tidings Brought to Mary: A Mystery*, Yale UP, New Haven (CT) 2007, Prologue.

capable of being a father. [...] the spiritual father transmits to his children [this is the phrase I want to emphasize] only what he has lived before in his concrete bodily experience, that is, in his concrete commitment to the world, to others and to God.”<sup>8</sup>

Spiritual parenting is not angelic parenting, but encompasses the fullness of life in all its dimensions. It originates in all the experiences of our person, especially in the affective one. The experience of spiritual fatherhood is also born of the experience of our sexuality; that is, of our being men, of our desire to fulfill ourselves as men, of our experience of affection and our desire to turn it to the good, of the continuous demand that the love of God purify our love for fellow man.

In our vocation to be parents, it is the way to live virginity in a true, authentic and fruitful way. A man who wants to live his virginity but does not want to be a father, who does not carry within himself the desire and the passion that what he lives should also be born in others – that man is a eunuch, one who is not worthy of the Kingdom of God. Fatherhood and virginity, therefore, identify with each other. Being a parent is a necessity for every human being, in the physiological sense, for both woman and man. In the woman it is more visible because of the transformation her body is undergoing; in the man it is manifested in the awareness he has of himself, of his own energies and of his own sexuality.

Therefore, spiritual fatherhood is an “obligation” for us. In the first place, it is a personal obligation: if we do not become parents, we will not become adults, that is, men. On the other hand, there is an obligation inherent in the ministry entrusted to us. Indeed, we have been sent to generate Christ in the hearts and lives of men. In other words, the priestly ministry is a spousal ministry. Therefore, there is nothing more contradictory for the priesthood than the infertility of one who is closed in on himself and feels the

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<sup>8</sup> J. GRANADOS, “Il sacerdozio: un sacramento del Padre”, *Communio* (ed. italiana) 222 (2009) 35.



people to whom he has been sent as a burden. I am not talking about the tiredness that is sometimes experienced in continually opening the door to people's problems. I am talking about a weariness that is felt towards people, because it threatens an order that we have created to organize our life.

Jesus chose not to have a carnal family so that he could be everything to everyone he met. If you have a wife and children, you have to go home to them at night, you worry because one kid has the flu, because the other is not doing well at school... So that the heart could be completely God's and every man's, Jesus chose virginity. Virginity therefore enriches spiritual fatherhood and in a way is his condition. In the history of Christianity the great spiritual fathers, some of them laymen, have been *starets* and the monks, whose fatherhood was born of virginity.

Jesus not only chose this path, but he pointed it out to his apostles – even to those who were married. Therefore, Jesus felt the link between virginity and spiritual fatherhood as a great need for the work to which his apostles were called. The Church, rightly, has not defined it as a revealed truth; she has simply spoken of a great opportunity, of a great good. And history is proving her right.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude by pointing out the main school that has taught me the link between virginity and parenthood. The priestly life finds its center in the celebration of Mass and in Eucharistic adoration. Through adoration I continue to discover my filiation to God and so have learned what it means to be a father.

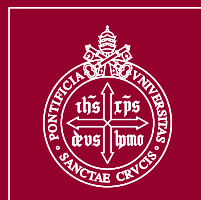
The Eucharist, in fact, is the sign of Christ's total obedience to the Father. The Father asks the Son to come down to earth, to become man. Christ lives this availability to the point of taking on the shape of a piece of bread. In this way he generates the life of all men and women in the world. In the unlimited obedience of his filiation, Christ becomes the generative father of the whole world.

The faith reaches the peripheries of the world by the attraction of love. That's why Pope Francis has recommended that we all embark on a "revolution of tenderness". Priests have a special role in this revolution, by loving and teaching others to love. They do so by the virtue of chastity, "a sign of purity in relationships and in the gift of self", as the new *Ratio* on the priestly formation (no. 21) has put it.

In February 2018, the Center for Priestly Formation (Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, Rome) organized the Fifth Study Week for Seminary Formation Staff, with the topic of *Teaching and Learning to Love: Human Affectivity and Christian Chastity*. Priests from 17 different countries attended the congress, sharing experiences from a variety of disciplines on forming the emotional life or affectivity of seminarians.

This book brings together some of the presentations given during the Study Week. It will be a great tool for any seminary formation staff and will help their seminarians to love God and men with ever purer hearts. That's how they'll become priests able to teach others to grow in this love.

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