

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND  
THE STATES OF LIFE:  
A REFLECTION ON THE  
ANTHROPOLOGICAL  
SIGNIFICANCE  
OF VIRGINITY AND MARRIAGE

• David S. Crawford •

“If the counsels and marriage disclose the authentic structure of creaturehood, as well as the meaning of the community creaturehood implies, then they also are called to ‘reconfigure’ the world . . . by simply being ‘what they are’ *in* the world.”

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Any discussion of “Christian community” should begin by grappling with the issue of how that community is grounded. Certainly it is true that the sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist—are the primitive source of ecclesial communion, and hence “Christian community.”<sup>1</sup> But what is the role of the Christian alternatives of marriage and virginity or celibacy? The fact of the matter is that their importance and centrality are often downplayed. This is despite the fact that the Church’s Magisterium has generally reinforced the significance of marriage and virginity for Christian life, particularly in the pontificate of John Paul II. The human person

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<sup>1</sup>See *Perfectae Caritatis*, 5; *Redemptionis Donum*, 7 (1984) (=RD); *Vita Consecrata*, 14 (1996) (=VC).

is a bodily creature, and this means that the question of how he bestows himself necessarily involves his self-gift precisely as a bodily creature.<sup>2</sup> Thus, “Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realizing the vocation of the human person, in its entirety, to love: marriage and virginity or celibacy. Either one is, in its own proper form, an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being ‘created in the image of God’” (FC 11), that is to say, in the image of the triune God who *is* both love and communion. Consecrated virginity, as “superior,”<sup>3</sup> constitutes a direct gift to God of one’s whole personal being. Marriage sacramentally “signifies and participates [*significant atque participant*]” in the mutual self-gift of Christ and his bride.<sup>4</sup> But isn’t this being a gift both to and from God, and the resultant human “vocation” to love, the foundation of all Christian community?

There are many reasons, no doubt, to downplay the states of life.<sup>5</sup> With respect to marriage, the growing acceptance both legally

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<sup>2</sup>Cf., for example, John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 11 (1981) (=FC), and John Paul’s development of the “nuptial meaning of the body,” in *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1997), 60-71.

<sup>3</sup>Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XXIV (11 November 1563), Canon 10 (DS, 1810); Pius XII, *Sacra Virginitas* (1954); VC 32 (1996) and FC 16.

<sup>4</sup>*Lumen Gentium*, 11. Cf. FC 13 and *Letter to Families*, 19 (1994) (=LF).

<sup>5</sup>The term “state of life” is, of course, not univocal. On the one hand, the basic Christian “state of life” refers to simple membership in the Church. The phrase “states of life” (plural), on the other hand, generally refers either to the clerical and lay states or to the married state and “consecration” in the evangelical counsels. (See, generally, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983].) For present purposes, the term “states of life” refers to this latter pair. In this context, “Christian states of life” (singular) may refer either to marriage or consecration. In fact, of course, there are other variations, as well: e.g., simple consecrated virginity (without the other two vows). Likewise, the question arises as to how the secular priesthood (with its obedience to the bishop and discipline of celibacy) fits into this latter pair. For purposes of this essay, these variations may be treated as falling, by way of participation, within the general ambit of the counsels. What *is* important, however, is that marriage and the various forms of consecration are “states of life,” within the meaning intended in this essay, only because they are founded in vows or promises. There is no alternative “single state of life,” that is to say, a “state of life” that is neither marriage or consecration. As Balthasar persuasively argues, no such “third” state of life is possible, since a state of life can only be founded on irrevocable vows according to which the entire person gives himself away: “If . . . a ‘third state’ were actually recognized as valid, it would seriously endanger the Christian radicalism of both the Christian married state and the Christian state of

and culturally of liberalized divorce, the drift toward an estrangement of marriage from procreation, the “mainstreaming” of non-marital “cohabitation” have all contributed to a diminution of marriage’s identity and mission. On the other hand, we often hear of the “vocations crisis” and the concomitant “graying” of many religious orders. And then, of course, there are the repeated demands to “rethink” the Roman Catholic discipline of priestly celibacy. With all of these difficulties, it might seem safest to anchor our discussion of Christian community on simple membership in the Church and allow the “states of life” to serve more generally as “contexts” in which Christians live out that membership, according to their predilections and sense of calling.<sup>6</sup>

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election . . . . No third form on which a state of life could be based is conceivable besides these two forms of genuine self-giving, nor does revelation envisage any such third form” (Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 235–238, here, 238). See also FC, 11, and *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 20 (1988) (=MD). Of course, Balthasar’s point is carefully qualified. He does not mean to say that those who never enter either state are somehow less holy and mature as Christians. Indeed, there are many reasons why it would be impossible, even wrong, for a given individual to enter either state (*The Christian State of Life*, 236–237). What we are speaking of here is the objective form of the two possibilities, marriage and virginity (particularly when this latter is combined with the other two counsels), and this objective form can only arise through permanent vows.

For obvious reasons, this essay will focus on virginity’s analogous relationship with Christian marriage, although parts 1 and 2 will situate virginity within the broader context of the other two counsels. However, as we shall see, the relationship between virginity and the other counsels is “circumincensive,” that is to say, each contains, implies, and supports the other two. Thus, where comparison is made between virginity and marriage, by extension marriage’s relationship with the other counsels is implied.

<sup>6</sup>This tendency would seem to be evident, for example, in the following statement of Edward Schillebeeckx in his 1985 jubilee address: “Only a living relationship to God in Jesus Christ gives a religious significance both to marriage (and to other interpersonal human relations) and to celibacy willingly adopted or forced on one by circumstances. I resolutely dispute that they have this religious significance in and of themselves. I therefore challenge both the twentieth-century religious mystification of marriage and the age-old Western Greek-Christian mystification of celibacy. In themselves, both marriage and celibacy are religiously neutral, in the sense that both can be part of meaningful human existence even without belief in God” (“For the Sake of the Kingdom of God,” in *For the Sake of the Gospel*, trans. John Bowden [New York: Crossroad, 1990], 167). While we might agree, at least as a preliminary point, that “a living relationship to God in Jesus Christ” gives the possibilities of marriage and virginity or celibacy their “religious significance,” we might still want to question what is

But what is at stake in this question? There is always a tendency to consider consecrated virginity—and the evangelical counsels generally—as a kind of religious “plus,” a regimen for the especially devout Christian. According to this understanding, consecration easily slides into a merely “accidental” relationship to a more “basic” and universal ecclesial, moral, and spiritual life. If this approach truncates the significance of the counsels, it also poses a threat to the Christian sense of marriage, which tends to become a mere context in which holiness can occur, but which still, at the deepest level, bears an extrinsic relationship to that holiness. The result is an ecclesiological ambiguity: an age-old tendency toward clericalism (because the defining ecclesial distinction is then assimilated almost entirely into the other architectonic polarity, that between the clerical and lay states), and a more recent tendency to adopt the individualist pattern of community presupposed by liberalism (because the states of life cannot, then, offer a further “articulation” and “expression” of the interior meaning of membership in the Church herself, in terms of nuptial “belonging”).

Of course, there has been a tendency to “blur” the lay/clerical distinction through a “laicization” of the priesthood and the “clericalization” of the laity. However, this blurring does not resolve the basic problem of “clericalism,” which it tries to address—it simply “democratizes” it.<sup>7</sup> In fact, these two results, the tendency toward (the current manifestation of) clericalism and the “democratizing” of ecclesiology, are closely related. Clericalism

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suggested by the assertion that they do not have this “significance in and of themselves” or that they are “religiously neutral,” or that it is (therefore) necessary to “challenge” their “mystification.” For reasons that should become clear in the remainder of this essay, it seems to me that passages such as this fail adequately to thematize the full significance of marriage and virginity and are, therefore, ambiguous and misleading. The tendency of this passage is to view the two states in terms of “Christian motivation” (see, for example, Schillebeeckx’s discussion of “marriage in the Lord” in *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery* [London: Sheed & Ward, 1965], 174). The present essay argues, on the other hand, that the states contain the interior structure of the creaturely relationship with God, however distorted and defaced their anthropological significance may at times be. Hence, marriage and virginity are objectively a response to the question “*Why be a human person—and how?*” (RD 5).

<sup>7</sup>See David Schindler, “Creation and Nuptiality: A Reflection on Feminism in Light of Schmemmann’s Liturgical Theology,” *Communio* 28 (Summer 2001): 291–92.

identifies the form of the Church and her holiness most fundamentally with her clerical structure and its functions. Similarly, liberalism tends to value people in terms of activity and production. In a culture dominated by the liberal-democratic *Zeitgeist*, then, the response is to parcel out those functions in a kind of democratic leveling. This pattern of thought reflects the presupposition that the Church-world relation is almost exhaustively contained in the clerical structure of the Church (into which the most devout of the laity are now partially assumed) with the rest of the world. My point, which will reemerge in the final section of this essay, is that, if we want to move beyond the problem of clericalism, we need to situate the analogous (*similitudo et semper maior dissimilitudo*) relationship of the consecrated and married states, in terms of their offering the “inner form of holiness,” “prior” to the polarity/ distinction between the lay and priestly states. As John Paul II tells us, the “Marian dimension of the Church is antecedent to that of the Petrine, without being in any way divided from it or others, including obviously Peter himself and the Apostles. This is so . . . because [the Petrine] triple function has no other purpose except to form the Church in line with the ideal of sanctity already programmed and prefigured in Mary.”<sup>8</sup> As will become clear in the course of this essay, both the counsels and marriage offer the form and content of the Marian fiat and receptivity, and therefore, as I would argue, of nuptial “belonging,” and all Christian and human communion.

The thesis of this essay, then, is that the states of life—that is to say, marriage and consecration—are “fundamental to,” and therefore disclose the inner meaning of, Christian community and, indeed, all authentically human community. By “fundamental” I mean that marriage and virginity engage the human person’s desire and freedom for community at their deepest level, the level at which the human person is *capax Dei*. This is because human desire and freedom are ordered at their deepest level within the human vocation to communion in love (cf. *Veritatis Splendor* [=VS], 86), and marriage and consecration bear within themselves— analogously—the objective “form” of this love (cf. FC 11). Thus, if

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<sup>8</sup>MD 27, fn. 55; cf. also David Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 1996), 255.

the Church has always taught that virginity for the sake of the Kingdom (when professed along with the other two evangelical counsels) is a “state of perfection,” it will be argued here that marriage also carries within itself the (analogous) form of this perfection. Positing this analogous and complementary relationship between the two states of life is warranted because nuptiality is at the root of both in their realization of the human vocation and destiny in self-gift to the mystery of the other. But if virginity (along with the other counsels) and marriage are “fundamental,” in the sense intended here, then they are also a fuller “expression” (cf. FC 11, 56, RD 7), or “articulation” and “disclosure,” of the interior meaning of the communion initiated in the “fundamental choice” of faith (cf. VS 65–66), contained universally in Baptism and the other sacraments of initiation.

We will begin (part 1) with a discussion of the idea of a “state of perfection,” constituted in the evangelical counsels generally, as entailing the “inner form of love.” Next, we will discuss virginity as situated within the fuller context of the other evangelical counsels, poverty and obedience, arguing that the counsels, each in its own way, show us the authentic relationship between the creature and God (part 2). Only then will we move on (part 3) to discuss virginity, as such, arguing that virginity, as possessing a certain priority among the counsels, indicates the nuptial character of the most fundamental human longing and freedom (the “*desiderium naturale*”). We will then discuss marriage as a state of life (part 4), arguing that marriage, as “revealed to itself”<sup>9</sup> in virginity, also necessarily engages this most fundamental human longing and freedom. Finally, we will conclude with an elaboration of how marriage and virginity disclose the meaning of Christian community (part 5).

### 1. Status perfectionis

Relevant to our theme is Hans Urs von Balthasar’s subtle but important correction of an ambiguity in St. Thomas.<sup>10</sup> The ambiguity arises due to the necessity of distinguishing between a “state of perfection” and perfection itself. How can we say that the

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

<sup>10</sup>Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 41–65.

counsels form a state of perfection, without implying that the lay state is a “state of imperfection”? As Balthasar points out, Thomas first accounts for the relationship between the counsels and the perfection of love in terms of the relationship between “means” and “end.” If perfection is charity itself, the counsels are the most suitable means to achieve that end.<sup>11</sup> In other words, when accounting for the difference between the state of perfection and perfection itself, Thomas treats the counsels as an instrumental cause. In this way, Thomas is able to avoid the conclusion that those who do not enter the religious state are in a “state of imperfection,” a result that would run contrary to the teaching that the precept of *perfectio caritatis* applies to all without exception. If the counsels are considered means to the achievement of charity, Thomas can affirm that not all who are in a “state of perfection” (viz. the religious state and the episcopal state) are perfect (Thomas uses the example of wicked bishops and religious), while some of those who are not in a state of perfection are nevertheless perfect.<sup>12</sup> The counsels may be a means, indeed the most effective means, but they are not the only way to achieve charity.

Elsewhere, however, Thomas views the counsels as a personal imitation of Christ’s self-holocaust.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that they are more than a means. It suggests that the counsels, as such, constitute the actual objective self-giving of charity. Hence, it would seem, a subtle shift has occurred in Thomas’ thought: “the evaluation of the counsels as ‘the way of perfection,’ as merely a means of attaining a goal toward which all must strive, shifts noticeably to an evaluation of them as a ‘degree of love,’ as the higher level of love that itself seems to be greater because it proceeds from greater self-renunciation.”<sup>14</sup> The question then remains: How can we avoid the implication that those who do not enter a “state of perfection” are in a “state of imperfection”? In part, Balthasar’s

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<sup>11</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 184, a. 3 (=ST); see also idem., *De Perfectione vitae spiritualis*. For an English translation see *The Religious State, the Episcopate, and the Priestly Office*, trans. Fr. J. Proctor (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1950), chapters 6 and 10, pages 17-18, 47.

<sup>12</sup>ST II-II, q. 184, a. 4.

<sup>13</sup>ST II-II, q. 186, a. 1; *The Religious State*, chapter 11, pages 48-52.

<sup>14</sup>Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 46.

solution is found in “Ignatian indifference.”<sup>15</sup> A Christian enters the state of the counsels only in response to a specific vocation. What is important, then, is to be open to God’s possible call to the state of election. More importantly for our present purposes, Balthasar’s solution also entails the understanding of the counsels as the “inner form” of love, and therefore of the whole Christian life. “Every true love has *the inner form of a vow*,” Balthasar tells us.<sup>16</sup> Later, he argues that the state of election is the “*forma sui et totius*.”<sup>17</sup> Hence, Balthasar “corrects” Thomas insofar as he places more emphasis on the notion of the counsels (1) as a vocation rather than a mere choice between a higher and a lower way<sup>18</sup> and (2) as the “inner form” of love in the sense that the counsels constitute the reality of having given oneself away and therefore of being utterly available and belonging entirely to the Lord.

Balthasar’s intention is not, of course, to discount the notion of the counsels as a “means” to achieve charity,<sup>19</sup> but only to point out the unresolved tension in Thomas’ thought. What is at stake here, it would seem, is the question of primacy. What remains unthematized in the emphasis on the counsels as “means” is the way in which the states of life further articulate the foundational communion begun in the sacraments of initiation, bringing it to its “fuller expression” or “specification” and indeed disclosing, interpreting, and realizing its inner meaning.<sup>20</sup> When we shift our understanding of the counsels from seeing them primarily as a means of achieving charity to primarily offering the objective “form and content” of charity, we can see that the counsels correspond to the very form and structure of the vocation of human nature itself. The role of the counsels as “precious instruments” should be set within the “prior” reality of their constituting the objective act of self-surrender. We have to ask ourselves, however, why it is only these three sacrifices which constitute the foundation of a state of life. Why not some other set of sacrifices, whether vowed or not?

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 54ff.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 205.

<sup>18</sup>See the contrary opinion of Vermeersch on the question of the counsels as choice: *Religious and Ecclesial Vocation*, trans. Joseph Kempf (S. Louis: B. Herder, 1925).

<sup>19</sup>Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 64.

<sup>20</sup>See FC 11; RD 7.

Traditionally, the answer to this question has been that these three counsels constitute all that the creature has to give. They therefore signify, as John Paul II puts it, a “belonging wholly to God” (see, e.g., VC 25, 26, 36; RD 3, 7, 8), being “his exclusive possession” (RD 7, 8) a having given up everything to follow Christ: exterior goods, goods of the body, and even one’s own freedom and will.

The discussion up to this point suggests that we should situate the counsels within the whole, fundamental human vocation. If the counsels make explicit and concrete the “inner form of love,” they likewise make explicit and concrete the meaning of human existence. We can say on this basis that the counsels disclose the very structure of creaturehood. As the pope puts it, “Vocation carries with it the answer to the question: *Why be a human person—and how?*” (RD 5). Or again, “The evangelical *counsels* in their essential purpose aim at ‘the renewal of creation’: ‘the world,’ thanks to them, is to be subjected to man and given to him in such a way that man himself may be perfectly given to God” (RD 9). In seeing the “inner form” of creaturehood expressed in the counsels, we can also see that the counsels express the authentic meaning of community, beginning with the “community” implied in creation *ex nihilo*, but also in the idea of human community itself.<sup>21</sup>

## 2. The evangelical counsels and creation

But what can be said more specifically about the counsels’ disclosure of the inner meaning of creation? While much more could be said than is possible here, we could begin with “poverty,” which expresses the true situation of the creature before his Creator. As Balthasar puts it, Adam and Eve “lived in a

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<sup>21</sup>Giving the counsels a deep anthropological interpretation also indicates their role as a response to sin. If we understand by sin (either original or personal) a rejection of the actual relationship, the original covenant, with the Creator, then we will also see that it is in fact a rejection of creaturehood (and therefore of community) itself. The result is the triad given by John, the “lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life” (1 Jn 2:16), against which the counsels are traditionally posed. Each of these “lusts” constitutes a kind of rejection of the truth of creaturehood, of being “from” the Creator, made “for” trinitarian communion, and called to *fiat*, that is to say, to a free ratification of the true relationship with the Creator.

state that was at once *perfect riches and perfect poverty*. Poverty, because they possessed nothing for themselves that they did not receive from God either directly or indirectly through nature and that they did not willingly and gratefully return to him.”<sup>22</sup> Certainly this original poverty applies, not only to “external goods,” those things necessary to live in this world, but also—and most especially—to personal existence itself. If the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* means anything at all, it stands for the fundamental fact that the creature is not self-derived, that everything given to him, including his personal existence and given nature, comes “from” Another, and does so in absolute gratuity. Likewise, human destiny in trinitarian communion is something the creature can never claim as his own, under his own power, or outside of pure gift. Thus, the fact that man is destined beyond himself in an absolute sense, in divinization, also indicates the creature’s fundamental and ontological “poverty.” Everything the creature is, or ever can be, is ultimately from Another, and comes from that Other in the form of utter gratuity. If man’s one final end is in the “utterly-beyond,” then his one “fulfillment,” his final “richness,” is something he can only receive from within his fundamental position of poverty.

Indeed, we may go so far as to say that this position of poverty is central to man as *imago Dei*. Certainly, the *kenosis* of the Word in the Incarnation and the Cross involves a giving up of divine riches for the state of creaturely poverty (2 Cor 8:9). “*The poverty of Christ conceals in itself this infinite richness of God; it is indeed an infallible expression of it. A richness, in fact, such as the Divinity itself could not have been adequately expressed in any created good. It can be expressed only in poverty*” (RD 12). But even within the Trinity itself we may see the primordial source of the idea of poverty. Within the riches of divinity there is the “from” of generation, and therefore of being absolutely *from* another, in the Son. At this point we are clearly speaking in very analogous terms. Nevertheless, the fundamental position of “having” and “being” only what has been first given, is a condition so basic to man that it is located in the very data of creation *ex*

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<sup>22</sup>Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 104.

*nihilo* and the imaging of God in and through Christ, the “firstborn of all creation”(Col 1:15).<sup>23</sup>

Now it is important to qualify what has been said here by adding that we must also affirm, along with the “structural poverty” of creaturehood, the secondary and necessary “structure of richness” in the creature. Whatever riches there are in creaturehood, however, are first and foremost grounded in the free gift of the triune Persons. While these “riches” are real and not a mere illusion—the creature, his nature, and his destiny, do not disappear or evaporate in front of the Creator—they are always more fundamentally grounded in a prior and absolute poverty of the creature. The creature is a *gift* both in his origin and in his destiny. This is as basic to Christian faith as belief in the Resurrection. The response of poverty to the call—“go, sell what you possess and give to the poor” and “come, follow me” (Mt 19:21)—is an acknowledgment, a living out, and a making explicit of this basic “from and for” that is, in fact, built into the very notion of creaturehood.

Likewise, with respect to obedience, we can see that this “from and for,” origin and destiny, *exitus* and *reditus*, give rise to the radical moment of personal-spiritual “in-itselfness” of the creature, the fact that he must ratify this “from and for” in his “freedom,” his *fiat*.<sup>24</sup> Thus freedom arises within an original relationship to the “Other” and therefore always contains the interior structure of obedience, an obedience grounded in the truth of this relationship. Again, the source of this claim can only be found by retracing freedom back to creation *ex nihilo*, and indeed to the trinitarian relations themselves. Creaturely, finite freedom is the “image” of the triune Persons’ infinite freedom, and again, in the first instance, the image of the “from” and “for,” and the freedom in obedience of the

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<sup>23</sup>As David Schindler tells us: “All creatures, made in and through Christ, thereby ‘image’ him—precisely in his receptivity to the Father . . . . Creatures ‘image’ God not first as Father (he who goes out of himself, who pours himself forth, who communicates himself), but as Son (he who receives from another, who is communicated)” (*Heart of the World*, 284).

<sup>24</sup>For a discussion of the nature of the “person” presupposed by this understanding of freedom, see Schindler, *Heart of the World*, 275f; Joseph Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” *Communio* 17 (Fall 1990): 439–454; Balthasar, “On the Concept of Person,” *Communio* 13 (Spring 1986): 18–26; and John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

Son.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, freedom is always interiorly structured as both coming “from” (creation is God’s first covenantal act *ad extra*)<sup>26</sup> and moving “toward” communion (the creature is “called” from the beginning). Freedom, in other words, is both “given” to the creature and authentically his own.

It is in this context, then, that we would want to place the counsel of “virginity.” In fact, virginity seems to be given a kind of primacy among the counsels by John Paul II, who calls it the “first and essential” counsel.<sup>27</sup> This primacy stems from virginity’s spousal character, its constituting a complete and exclusive “belonging to the Lord.” Virginity, as the pope says, “is addressed in a particular way to the love of the human heart. It places greater emphasis on the spousal character of this love, while poverty and still more obedience seem to emphasize primarily the aspect of redemptive love contained in religious consecration” (RD 11). Virginity expresses, perhaps, a natural consequence of the creature’s fundamental poverty. If the creature’s “poverty” points to the gratuity of his existence and his call, virginity points to the nuptial ordination of the creature implied by this destiny.<sup>28</sup> Virginity indicates the object toward which human freedom is ordered. If “[p]erfection demands that maturity in self-giving to which human freedom is called” (VS 17), the “way and at the same time the content of this perfection consists in the following of Jesus, *sequela Christi*, once one has given up one’s own wealth and *very self*”

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<sup>25</sup>Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 2: *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 259.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. J. Martínez Camino, “‘Through Whom All Things Were Made’: Creation in Christ,” *Communio* 28 (Summer 2001): 214-229.

<sup>27</sup>VC 14. See also, 26: “It is in this perspective that we can understand more clearly the role of consecrated life as an *eschatological sign*. In fact it has constantly been taught that the consecrated life is a foreshadowing of the future Kingdom. . . . It does this above all by means of the *vow of virginity*, which tradition has always understood as an *anticipation of the world to come*, already at work for the total transformation of man.” Or again, 32: “The Church has always taught the pre-eminence of perfect chastity for the sake of the Kingdom, and rightly considers it the ‘door’ of the whole consecrated life.”

<sup>28</sup>See, e.g., John Paul II, General Audience (14 April 1982), in *Theology of the Body*, 277-278. See also, for example, MD 21 (1988): “A woman is ‘married’ either through the sacrament of marriage or spiritually through marriage to Christ. *In both cases marriage* signifies the ‘sincere gift of the person’ of the bride to the groom. In this way, one can say that the profile of marriage is found spiritually in virginity.”

(VS 19, emphasis added). This giving of the “very self” is presumably a real expression of the content and meaning of love. Virginité expresses the exclusive personal “belonging” that is the object and content of this self-giving love, and the universal destiny of human, personal nature itself. Human fulfillment is found in utter availability and transparency to the Lord.

We should add here that while we have reflected on the counsels *seriatim*, in fact they possess a circumincessive relationship, each implying the content of the others. For example, if I have associated virginité with the movement of the creature toward belonging in self-gift, poverty and obedience, each in its own way, obviously express this as well. Likewise, both virginité and obedience express the absolute gratuity of the creature’s existence and call. But more importantly, each of the counsels depends on the others for its interior content and form. Thus, as we will see more fully below, virginité, as absolute belonging, depends on the possibility of personal *fiat*, which possesses the interior form of freedom in relation to the other, and therefore, of obedience. Nonetheless, if we accept the pope’s own thought, we will accord to virginité a primacy in signifying the nuptial ordination of human nature, of “belonging” as a bodily-spiritual creature.

### 3. Freedom, desire, and virginité

The foregoing sets the stage for seeing virginité and the other counsels as a basic response to the “human vocation to love” (FC 11), which is the fundamental vocation of human nature itself. Thus, virginité is “fundamental” in the deepest sense: that is to say, it is anthropologically-ontologically “fundamental.”

Recall that *Veritatis Splendor* speaks of “the lofty vocation which the faithful have received in Christ, the only response fully capable of satisfying the desire of the human heart” (7). In *Vita Consecrata*, the pope speaks of virginité as expressing “the yearning of the heart unsatisfied by any finite love” (36). Because the creature’s “from and for” is fundamental to his very nature, it follows that, built into the creature, indeed constitutive of the creature’s concrete nature, is a “natural desire” (*a desiderium naturale*) for the destiny this “from and for” represents. Hence, what we mean by claiming that virginité is “fundamental” is that the desire for this end, which grounds the being of the creature, finds in the response

of virginity its fullest expression. Virginity therefore tracks the basic “paradox” of human existence itself, viz. human nature “desires” and is called to what is utterly beyond it.<sup>29</sup> Again, each counsel does this in its own way: poverty expresses the fact that man’s origin and end can never be claimed as his own; obedience expresses the fact that freedom always implies obedience to the truth of the other. However, virginity’s particular expression of creaturehood seems more explicitly to indicate the fundamental human “desire” and possibility of belonging to God.

This last claim must be carefully qualified. Virginity, of course, possesses an obvious “discontinuity” with experienced human desire. On one level, therefore, virginity stands in opposition to the experience of fulfillment. Particularly in our fallen world, the self-gift of virginity seems to be, in fact, a denial of human, nuptial yearning. Even more radically, human longing is “paradoxical” precisely because it awaits its fulfillment in a call that comes entirely from without and beyond. Hence, the “desire” for this “fulfillment” is a desire for what in principle lies beyond the horizon of human expectations and, indeed, even turns those expectations on their head. Whatever “fulfillment” is held out for the creature—once (or if) his deepest longing is revealed to him<sup>30</sup>—is an unanticipated fulfillment, a fulfillment that in principle cannot originate from within the creature itself and can only be realized in a self-emptying and seeming discontinuity with everyday desires.

Nevertheless, virginity must also offer a hidden “fulfillment” of authentic human desire, a “fulfillment” that does not signify a “naturalization” of God’s gift of supernatural life. It indicates, rather, that, once the call reveals to the creature the existence and nature of his deepest longing, the supernatural gift indeed *does*, at the same time, hold out his deepest fulfillment, a fulfillment that can only be received as a “new creation,” or “a kind of death,” or a “self-

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<sup>29</sup>Of course, framing the question of the relationship between nature and its concrete end in God in terms of the “paradox” of man’s *desiderium naturale* is associated with the work of Henri de Lubac. See, generally, *Summae: Études historiques: nouvelle édition avec la traduction intégrale des citations latines et grecques* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1946, reprinted Desclée de Brouwer, 1991); *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1998, reprint from 1967); and *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, trans. Richard Arnandez (San Francisco: Ignatius Press: 1984).

<sup>30</sup>De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 207.

emptying.”<sup>31</sup> Taken up and contained within self-emptying is the perduring form, therefore, of desire. Stated in another way, eros is not destroyed by agape, but is taken up and contained within it. If agape possesses a kind of “absolute” priority, eros possesses its own “subordinate,” but nonetheless real, priority. Thus, eros is not only safeguarded and realized in its integrity, but it is safeguarded and realized precisely as eros. It bears emphasizing, therefore, that this “fulfillment” must be understood only in the sense that man at his ontological depths possesses, or rather *is*, a *desiderium naturale*, understood as a capacity, openness or readiness, which can only be “filled” by his responsive *fiat* to a “call” from beyond his horizon of experience.

This “fulfillment-in-self-emptying” must be affirmed if the response of the creature is not simply to be a kind of alienation, a demand of obedience to a strictly alien and extrinsic norm. The cost of denying the moment of fulfillment-within-discontinuity is to slide into nominalism and voluntarism, to deny the moment of eros in agape. Ultimately, such a denial constitutes a rejection of what the pope says in the first chapter of *Veritatis Splendor* about the vocation in Christ corresponding to the deepest longing of the human creature. If we do not see this moment of underlying resonance and fulfillment, then we must ask: What does this “vocation” have to do with me, a concrete human being? Is this not merely a voluntaristic imposition? Moreover, if the call is not at the deepest level a “fulfillment” of the creature, then the creature would have no genuine capacity for it.<sup>32</sup> Not only would the “counsel” of consecrated virginity constitute an invitation to an alienating state of life, but since the claim of the Church is that all are called to the “spousal love” that is most perfectly revealed in virginity, this alienation would necessarily be the universal destiny of man.

Virginity makes the response to the “call” concrete and “categorical.” In other words, this response in virginity lies directly along the axis of the *desiderium naturale* and the “call” to “divinization.” It is the fundamental further and complete expression

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 141.

of the underlying spousal form of the sacraments of initiation,<sup>33</sup> since it is the fullest response to the call to “follow me,” which again is the vocation of all men and of human nature itself. As such, then, we can see that virginity, as a response coming from the deepest level of the creature’s capacity and desire, represents also the most radical exercise of the human possibility for *fiat*. In a word, the response of virginity can be seen to engage human freedom at its most radical level, at the level of the capacity of the creature to exercise its freedom for God in a self-actualizing *fiat*.<sup>34</sup> If it is a basic *fiat* to belonging wholly to the Lord, it must engage the most radical level of freedom, the freedom that is given and enabled by the call, by revelation’s disclosure of the mystery of man and his fundamental *desiderium*.

If, in sum, the counsels are an expression of the authentic relationship of the creature and the Creator, then they must at the same time constitute the paradigmatic and fullest response to the human vocation itself. It follows that they engage the creature’s desire and freedom at the deepest level, the level at which man is *capax Dei*. As such, they express the interior nature of human desire and freedom. But if virginity, as a complete bestowal of oneself to the “only Spouse,”<sup>35</sup> constitutes a *spousal* or *nuptial* response to the human vocation, we must also say that it responds, at the deepest level, to the human desire for *nuptial fulfillment*. And if the fundamental response and fulfillment of the human vocation in Christ is spousal, as is communicated by the paradigmatic response in virginity (and, by extension, poverty and obedience), then it must

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<sup>33</sup>The nuptial character of the sacraments of initiation is particularly well brought out by Matthias Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1946), 374, 543-44. For its part, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it thus: “The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Already Baptism, the entry into the People of God, is a nuptial mystery; it is so to speak the nuptial bath [citing Eph 5:26-27] which precedes the wedding feast, the Eucharist” (1617).

<sup>34</sup>*Veritatis Splendor*, 65-66, both criticizes certain versions of the thesis of “fundamental option” and validates a sense of “fundamental choice” in accord with Sacred Scripture and tradition. The valid understanding of fundamental option is based on the basic act of faith, but is made concrete in the *sequela Christi*. The pope emphasizes the radical engagement of freedom that the *sequela Christi* therefore entails.

<sup>35</sup>John Paul II, General Audience (14 April 1982), in *Theology of the Body*, 277; MD 20.

also be true that the deepest human longing is fundamentally nuptial. Virginity, then, must constitute the fulfillment of the deepest *nuptial* desire of the creature. We will see below the light this sheds on the authentic meaning of human community.

#### 4. Marriage and the following of Christ

a. *The Magisterium on marriage.* Our goal, here, is to show the “fundamental” character of the “states of life,” that is to say, of both virginity and marriage, for the meaning of ecclesial communion. But it would seem that we have simply made our initial problem more difficult with respect to marriage. If virginity is “fundamental” to the human vocation in the sense argued above, marriage must be pushed further in the direction of constituting a merely “secular” or “temporal” reality, bearing a merely extrinsic relationship to the following of Christ. Hence, we might conclude, the tendency to downplay the importance of the states of life would be warranted, at least with respect to marriage. In contrast to virginity, marriage entails an obvious “continuity” with the created order and the natural and everyday inclinations of the creature. How can this continuity with “natural human inclinations”<sup>36</sup> relate to the call to “Deny your desires [so as to] find what your heart desires”<sup>37</sup>? If the counsels *are* indeed the “inner form” of perfect love (belonging wholly to the Lord), what place can marriage have in the universal vocation to this same perfect love? After all, virginity is the renunciation of the married life in favor of “belonging wholly to God,” being “His exclusive possession.” Perhaps we are left at the impasse Thomas sought to avoid.

Few would doubt that the last century or so has seen remarkable development in the doctrine and theology of marriage. To illustrate this point, we can look to Leo XIII’s *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* (1880). Leo clearly affirms that Christian spouses are called to “holiness in marriage [*sanctitatem in ipso coniugio*]” (7). What remains unclear, however, is the meaning of this “in.” It is perfectly possible that this “in” could indicate that marriage is merely a locus

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<sup>36</sup>ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2. See also generally, Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 437-444.

<sup>37</sup>De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 230 (quoting St. John of the Cross).

or context in which holiness may be achieved. Such an understanding, however, would relate marriage and holiness extrinsically. Since *Arcanum*, the Magisterium has increasingly specified the content of this “in” as constitutive and objective, i.e. marriage *constitutively* and *objectively* possesses the “form” of holiness.<sup>38</sup> Thus, John Paul, in keeping with this development, rejects a merely subjective consideration of conjugal love. Rather, for him, the very act of entering into marriage (*consensus matrimonialis*), as an act of “total self-gift” of the human person as a bodily creature, constitutes an entering into the objective form of love, whose properties are necessarily and objectively (precisely as love) unity and indissolubility, and whose end is procreation. Hence, we find in his teaching on marriage the statement to which we have already referred: “Either [virginity or marriage] is, in its own proper form [*forma propria*], an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being ‘created in the image of God,’” which, as we saw, John Paul identifies as being in the image of the trinitarian God who “is Love” (FC 11). Or again, “The sacrament of marriage is the *specific source* and *original means* of sanctification for Christian married couples and

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<sup>38</sup>Fifty years after *Arcanum*, we find in Pius XI’s *Casti Connubii* a further development of what this “in” might mean. There Pius makes the famous statement that the “mutual inward molding of husband and wife, this determined effort to perfect each other [hoc assiduum sese invicem perficiendi studium]” can be called “the chief reason and purpose of matrimony [primaria matrimonii causa et ratio], provided matrimony be looked at not in the restricted sense as instituted for the proper conception and education of the child, but more widely as the blending of life as a whole and the mutual interchange and sharing thereof” (*Casti Connubii* [14]: *AAS* 22 [1930], 548-549). For its part, *Gaudium et Spes* tells us that it is “through the sacrament of marriage” that “our Saviour, the spouse of the Church, now encounters Christian spouses” and “abides with them” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48). Married love is thus “caught up in divine love and is directed and enriched by the redemptive power of Christ and the salvific action of the Church” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48). The married, therefore, “united” in “mutual holiness,” follow “in the footsteps of Christ, the principle of life,” and they “bear witness by their faithful love in the joys and sacrifice of their calling to that mystery of love which the Lord revealed to the world by his death and resurrection” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 52). Thus, we have a growing sense of marriage as a further expression of the baptismal call to love—that it possesses, objectively, the form of self-giving love. See García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium*, 234ff; Francisco Gil Hellín, “Marriage: Love and Institution,” trans. William May (unpublished manuscript of “El Matrimonio: Amor y Institución”), *Cuestiones Fundamentales sobre Matrimonio y Familia: El Simposio Internacional de Teología de la Universidad de Navarra* (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1980).

families. It takes up again and makes specific the sanctifying grace of Baptism” (FC 56). Or, “Christian spouses and parents are included in the universal call to sanctity. For them this call is *specified* by the sacrament they have celebrated and is carried out concretely in the realities proper to their conjugal and family life” (ibid., emphasis added).<sup>39</sup>

This development suggests that marriage, in a way that is analogous to virginity and the other counsels, also constitutes what we have characterized as a “fundamental” response. Disclosed in the counsels, as we have seen, is the radical nature of human freedom and desire: the human person possesses both the “desire” and the “freedom” to give himself away. The development of Church doctrine regarding marriage suggests that this fundamental relationship is contained (analogously) in marriage as well. Once this point has been granted, we will have to look at marriage somewhat differently than has typically been the case. If marriage and virginity are “the two specific ways of realizing the human vocation to love,” if each is, “in its own proper form, an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being ‘created in the image of God’” (FC 11), if the sacrament of marriage, like virginity, is “the *specific source* and *original means* of sanctification for Christian married couples and families,” if it “takes up again and makes specific the sanctifying grace of Baptism” (FC 56), then it must also, in some way, share in the engagement of the deepest desire and freedom of the human creature for God. It must also, in its own analogous way, disclose and make tangible the interior, irreducible, and universal truth of the creature, the fact that he is *capax Dei*.

We will address this point in two steps. First, we will argue that the structure of conjugal love is closely analogous to the interior structure of the “spousal love” disclosed in virginity. Second, we will argue that this structure, as realized in marriage, does not simply imply a “horizontal” and “terrestrial” analogy with virginity, but constitutes a “belonging wholly to the Lord” in the freedom and gift of the spouses themselves.

b. *The “Paradox” of conjugal love.* John Paul II has emphasized that marriage constitutes the most primitive encounter with the other (MD 7, 29) who can only be received as a gift and can only be responded to through a reciprocal self-gift (MD 29).

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<sup>39</sup>Citation to *Lumen Gentium*, 41.

This primordial encounter is inscribed in the very being of human persons as differentiated into man and woman: “From the very beginning, both are persons, unlike the other living beings in the world about them. *The woman is another ‘I’ in a common humanity*” (MD 6).<sup>40</sup> The fact that man is always either male or female, in other words, indicates that contained within humanity there is always-already an otherness.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, I find that I do not exist in some neutral relationship with this other. I find that I “need” this other, that I am “built” to go with this other, that I cannot really find fulfillment without this other, that I do not really come alive to myself (cf. Gn 2:18, 20; MD 7) until I am in the presence of this other.

In a way that is truly analogous to the interior movement of virginity, then, the fulfillment held out by the other in marriage can *in principle* only be received as utterly gratuitous, since what is desired is the other precisely as another “I,” that is to say, as a moment of authentic freedom, the capacity for *fiat*. To claim this other in a way that circumvents this gratuity would be to claim something less than the other; it would be to claim the other, not as a mystery greater than him- or herself, but as an object for my use. Furthermore, the analogy also indicates that this utter gratuity can only be received in a *responsive fiat* “in return,” that is to say, through a reciprocal gift of self. Again, nuptial self-bestowal must be mutual because, in receiving the other, one must accept the other in his or her integrity as free, since it is precisely this freedom, and the gratuity that depends on it, that is most fundamentally desired in the other. But this receiving of the other in his or her integrity can only be effected by a self-gift that “makes

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<sup>40</sup>See Angelo Scola, “The Dignity and Mission of Women: The Anthropological and Theological Foundations,” *Communio* 25 (Spring 1998): 46-47; idem, “The Nuptial Mystery at the Heart of the Church,” *Communio* 25 (Winter 1998): 634-636, 643-647. Scola has spoken in this context of “asymmetrical reciprocity” (645). “Asymmetry consists in the fact that sexual difference, in a significant and immediate way, testifies that the other always remains ‘other’ for me.” (645) “The ‘other’ always stands before me as ‘other’”—Yet this other is always an other “for me”—hence, “asymmetrical reciprocity.” Scola also claims that, within this “asymmetrical reciprocity”—between these two others, there is “space,” as he puts it, for a “third,” that is to say, the child. Scola also talks about how this encounter with the other calls on freedom. Our freedom, then, is set within the “asymmetrical reciprocity” of the man-woman relationship.

<sup>41</sup>Scola, “The Dignity and Mission of Women,” 46-47.

space” for the mystery that is at the base of the other’s freedom. Thus, the other offers him- or herself precisely as a gift, and can in principle only be received as a gift. Any “reception” that does not bear the interior freedom of gift is just so far not authentically nuptial. Thus, imprinted on both elements of the movement of nuptial desire (reception of the other and responsive self-gift) is the fundamental datum that the deepest desire for the other is for the human person precisely *as person*. That is to say, what is desired is the nuptial other in his or her integrity. Reception of this gratuitous self-gift of the other can only occur in the form of a reciprocal self-gift, because without this reciprocal self-gift, the other cannot be received *in his or her integrity*, that is, precisely as a mysterious capacity for God and the other in freedom. Hence, we are confronted with an analogous paradox to that revealed in virginity: it turns out that, in marriage, as in virginity, the *fulfillment* of nuptial desire itself is finally realized only in a *kenotic self-emptying for the other*.

What marriage is called to be, and what nuptial desire is called to be (and in Christ’s redemptive grace in principle can be), is revealed in its deepest dimension, then, in Christ’s disclosure of the human “call” and indeed in the paradigmatic response to that call in the vocation to consecrated virginity, inaugurated by Christ. What is revealed is that nuptial desire itself<sup>42</sup> takes (analogously) its interior form within Christ’s primordial vocation and redeeming grace, a grace which draws husband and wife into and specifies their mode of realization of the Christian paradoxical tension and interior movement of man toward the other. What the other in marriage holds out as fulfillment is an utter (if analogous) gratuity, which is revealed to be available only through a reciprocal self-gift; again, Christ and his inauguration of the possibility of virginity show the married that the nuptial desire for fulfillment is finally only achieved in self-emptying.<sup>43</sup> Hence, the discontinuity-continuity we discussed above with respect to virginity discloses that contained within the

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<sup>42</sup>It is important to bear in mind that “nuptial desire” does not here indicate “sexual desire.” Nuptial desire, grounded in the very capacity of the creature to give himself away in love, refers to the spiritual character of the body-person, which alone can give full meaning to the vocation to love. Sexuality, in Christ’s redemption, is called to constitute in marriage a concrete expression of that love (see, e.g., *Gaudium et Spes*, 49; FC 11).

<sup>43</sup>Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.

obvious “continuity” of marriage is the hidden “discontinuity” of self-emptying.

We may conclude, therefore, that it is the “other” precisely *as mystery and freedom, as capable of fiat*, that is desired. In short, what is desired, and what freedom is directed toward, is love. Or put another way, what is really desired is authentic belonging within the *communio personarum*.

c. *Marriage and the “status perfectionis.”* But does marriage constitute a fundamental and analogous response to the one human vocation to “follow” Christ, at least insofar as we then go on to characterize the content of this “following” as being entirely “available” and “open,” as “leaving everything behind” to belong entirely to Lord? Does marriage, however much “self-emptying” it may imply, simply lie along a “horizontal” axis of “worldly human desire” (however much refined and healed by grace) and therefore constitute a merely exterior analogy to virginity?

As a preliminary matter, we can say that in expressing man’s authentic relationship with the Creator, the evangelical counsels analogously express the authentic relationship with “the other,” because the other always constitutes a kind of “infinite” in his capacity for God. Or, more precisely, man is a “created mystery” that can (paradoxically) only be filled by the “uncreated mystery,” or a finite capacity that can (again, paradoxically) only be filled by infinite love. It has been said that man is “both greater and less” than himself.<sup>44</sup> It is precisely this depth or capacity that makes him capable of self-gift, because it is precisely this capacity that represents the freedom for *fiat*. In giving oneself in marriage, one is giving oneself to, and receiving, an *imago Dei*, that is to say, one is giving oneself to a spiritual being, a person, who is in this sense “both greater and less” than him- or herself and, as such, contains the mysterious capacity and freedom to receive the self-gift of the triune God, and to respond in complete self-gift. This is the foundational reality validating the claim that the human creature is a person.

Moreover, the following of Christ is not only the fundamental response of an individual to God. Rather, it must be

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<sup>44</sup>As de Lubac tells us: “Man, the fathers tell us, is ‘in the image of God,’ not because of his intellect, his free will, his immortality, not even because of the power he has received to rule over nature: beyond and above all this, he is so ultimately because there is something incomprehensible in his depths” (*Mystery of the Supernatural*, 209-10).

situated within ecclesial communion (cf. VS 119). As members of the Church, the bride and bridegroom who “give themselves” in marriage do not, strictly speaking, begin from the starting point of simply belonging to themselves. If membership in the Church brought about by the sacraments of initiation is a spousal reality, as the pope and the *Catechism* for example hold,<sup>45</sup> then the reality of “self-gift” is contained within the prior reality of not-belonging-to-onself, but belonging to the Lord.<sup>46</sup> Both self-gift and the reception of self-gift in the *consensus matrimonialis* are held within this ground of belonging to the Lord—hence, they constitute “marriage in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:39). This participation of the reality of man and woman in the ecclesial body, the universal reality of the Bride who belongs to her Lord, brings into focus the sacramental participation of Christian marriage in this very ecclesial reality. Hence, the fact of marriage’s sacramentality suggests that marriage constitutes a belonging to the Lord through the mediation of the spouses to each other.<sup>47</sup>

We have to ask ourselves precisely what is being given in the “self-giving” of marriage and virginity. The answer to this is clear: what is being given in each is the “self” as a complete spiritual/bodily being. But this spiritual/bodily being that is given and received is precisely a being with a mysterious depth and freedom for the radical *fiat* made possible within the human vocation and within the communal, and finally ecclesial, reality of the person. We argued above that virginity (along with the other counsels), as a complete self-gift of everything that the human person has to give, is a direct response to the call to “follow.” As such, it is an exercise of the most fundamental human freedom, corresponding to the reality of the human person as a capacity for a responsive *fiat* to God’s call.

Now, the *fiat* of marriage, also constituting a complete self-bestowal of the person “as a unified totality” (FC 11), is an exercise

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<sup>45</sup>RD 8; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1617.

<sup>46</sup>1 Cor 6:20; CCC, 1269; VS 11, 12; RD 7. See also, on this point, Alain Mattheeuws, *Les “dons” du mariage. Recherche de théologie morale et sacramentelle* (Brussels: Culture et Vérité, 1996), 434.

<sup>47</sup>“Through baptism, man and woman belong to Christ even in their bodies. They no longer belong to themselves. They are Christ’s. Their bodies are no longer theirs. Necessarily, therefore, Christ himself gives husband and wife to each other and delivers to each the body of the other as He has delivered his own body” (Mattheeuws, *Les “dons” du mariage*, 434 [my translation]).

of this same fundamental freedom for *fiat*, the freedom for complete, spousal self-gift. As members of the ecclesial body, a bride and bridegroom could potentially consecrate themselves to “the only Spouse” in the counsels. This would constitute a fundamental response to the “call.” That this same level of freedom is engaged in the marital *fiat* is clear when we consider that once the bride and bridegroom have given themselves in marriage, the possibility of self-gift in virginity and the other counsels is no longer available. Indeed, this is the very freedom to belong entirely to God and to find nuptial fulfillment in belonging only to God. Embedded within the self-gift of marriage, therefore, is contained the self-gift of virginity, the objective form of belonging wholly to “the one Spouse.”

At first glance, this would seem to be a definitive loss. However, this paradoxical fulfillment in self-emptying is a fulfillment in another who is at the very core of his or her being a *mystery*. Furthermore, contained within this mystery, the mystery of the other to whom this *fiat* is given and for whom this radical freedom is exercised, is membership in the body of Christ and the status of being a “temple of the Holy Spirit.” As such, this other is enabled to mediate Christ.<sup>48</sup> We can therefore say that this other holds out fulfillment not only through a receptive self-emptying but also as a person who *is more than him- or herself and therefore holds out the possibility of more than him- or herself*. Inasmuch as this “mystery” is the capacity for God, and is the very root of personal freedom, the spouses each give themselves to a mystery that is deeper than their very souls. This mutual self-emptying must necessarily be a self-giving to the mystery of the other, a mystery at the center of which stands Christ’s Spirit, who has first given himself, who is “Person-Gift” and indeed “Person-Love.”<sup>49</sup>

The counsels therefore disclose a further truth of the interior meaning of desire and freedom as expressed in marriage. If marriage engages the tension toward fulfillment in self-emptying for the other, it must also, as a state of life, engage human freedom along the axis of the *desiderium naturale*. It is in this sense that we can affirm that the

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<sup>48</sup>See *Redemptoris Mater*, 38, for a discussion of the way in which members of the Church, beginning in the highest sense with Mary, mediate Christ by means of their participation in his own unique mediation of the Father.

<sup>49</sup>*Dominum et Vivificantem*, 10.

spouses mediate the Lord to each other and that in and through their marriage they may be said to “belong wholly to the Lord.” It is a mediation which participates in Christ’s mediation of the Father and the Church’s mediation of Christ’s redemptive grace. The person is by nature always, as primitively “in relation,”<sup>50</sup> an inexhaustible mystery. In giving themselves to each other, the spouses give themselves to the Father in Christ and through the Holy Spirit. As Balthasar tells us: “the spouses are no longer opened only to each other—and hence closed to all others: they stand primarily in openness to God and, from this stand before God, give themselves to him and, at the same time, expect to receive from him the unexpected: the fruit of his grace.”<sup>51</sup>

Of course, all Christians may mediate Christ to each other and to the world as a whole. What is absolutely unique about Christian marriage, however, is that this mediation occurs in the existentially determinative act of a complete handing over of oneself, including one’s whole bodily/spiritual being and freedom for virginity (as a response to the call and as the beginnings of an objective fulfillment of the *desiderium naturale*), to the other in a permanent and vowed Christian state of life. Hence the handing over of one’s freedom for virginity (a freedom only enabled in Christ’s redemptive love and vocation) to the other in the “total self-gift” of marriage is a handing over of the *fiat* of complete belonging. In effect, one entrusts one’s freedom for belonging to “the only Spouse” to another who belongs to the Lord. But this means that it is precisely, therefore, the possibility, in the depth and mystery of human freedom, to respond to the Lord in virginity that shows the radical character of the self-gift in Christian marriage. Thus, the “superiority” of virginity is not a negative pronouncement on marriage, but the condition for marriage’s full realization as a Christian state of life.

Now, if the argument up to this point is correct, then marriage is also—that is to say, in a way that is analogous to life according to the counsels—“fundamental,” in the sense explained above, with respect to Christian community. This suggests not only that ecclesial communion is incomprehensible insofar as it is abstracted from the states of life, but also that each state is

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<sup>50</sup>Schindler, *Heart of the World*, 287-291.

<sup>51</sup>Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 246.

incomprehensible when abstracted from the other. Thus far, we have discussed the way in which the counsels, and virginity in particular, are necessary in order to understand marriage as a “belonging wholly to God,” and therefore as “fundamental” to the inner meaning of Christian community and, indeed, all authentically human community. At the same time, it follows that marriage discloses what is at the heart of the counsels. Marriage helps consecration to avoid a kind of individualism: in revealing something of the nature of nuptiality, it shows that virginity is not a kind of “aloofness,” or a self-centered search for “my holiness,” but is ordered to a radical communion of persons. The virgin or the celibate, in other words, holds him- or herself “aloof” precisely for the sake of an even more radical *communio*.<sup>52</sup> In summary, therefore, if virginity discloses the primacy of the relationship with God, and that any authentic relationship with the other always implies this primary relationship, marriage makes clear that the primary relationship of “belonging wholly to God” always also implies the “belonging” of the human community itself.<sup>53</sup>

##### 5. *The states of life and Christian community*

Drawing together the strands of our reflection, we may conclude by briefly elaborating our claim that the states of life disclose the meaning of Christian community. As has already been argued, if the states of life, beginning with the evangelical counsels,

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<sup>52</sup>MD 20; AAS 80 (1988), 1703: “[Virginity] cannot be compared to remaining simply unmarried or single, because virginity is not restricted to a mere ‘no,’ but contains a profound ‘yes’ in the spousal order: the gift of self for love in a total and undivided manner.”

<sup>53</sup>We have discussed the interior and complementary relationship between marriage and the counsels by focusing on virginity. However, once the “fundamental” character, as I have defined that term, of marriage has been shown through the analogy with virginity, the form of the other two counsels may also be shown to exist within marriage. This follows if the argument presented in parts 1 and 2 is correct regarding the circumincessive relationship among the three counsels. We have already seen how obedience/*fiat* is implied in the mutual self-bestowal to the mystery of the other/Other in both virginity and marriage. Likewise, “creaturely poverty,” as we saw above, is expressed (analogously) in “nuptial desire” (as we have used that term), and therefore both in virginity and the complete (mediated) gratuity with which spouses receive and bestow themselves.

disclose the authentic structure of creaturehood itself, then it is also true that they disclose the destiny of the human person in communion, both in the dimension of Creator-creature and in that of human relations, which achieve their fullness in ecclesial communion. Each state, in expressing the authentic relationship between the creature and the triune God, constitutes a modality of insertion in the ecclesial whole. Each constitutes an “articulation” of the basic reality of “belonging” to the Church through the sacraments of initiation, insofar as each constitutes a “fundamental” response to the radical vocation to love. The counsels direct the believer universally to the whole community, that is to say, all the particular persons in that community. Marriage, on the other hand, directs the believer toward the particular person in the particular *ecclesia domestica*, which is always set within the universal community of the Church. Hence, we can see, in their diverse ordinations, a complementarity regarding the larger community of the whole *Ecclesia*. Of course, the endpoint of the “universal” ordination of the counsels is the “particular” person. Likewise, the particular ordination of marriage possesses infinite implications and, therefore, a universal significance: children become adults, with their own ecclesial roles and vocations; the ripples expand infinitely. Finally, then, both the counsels and marriage are necessary to express the full reality of the ecclesial community, because each state expresses, in its own way, the interior reality of the other state and of the ecclesial whole, which is grounded in the human vocation to love.

More fundamentally, however, closely anchoring Christian community in the states of life shifts the ecclesiological emphasis from the relationship between the laity and the clergy to that of the alternative modes of nuptial/paradoxical gift contained in the two states, thereby also subtly shifting our sense of the Church/world relationship. Clericalism identifies the hierarchical priesthood with what is most fundamental to the Church, and therefore to the form of holiness itself, while also tending to see the Church as standing outside the world. The Church/world relationship then tends to be seen in terms of the hierarchical aspects of the Church, juridically conceived, either in confrontation with the world or in an

accommodationist “blessing” of worldly structures,<sup>54</sup> or perhaps in an appropriation of those structures into the Church.<sup>55</sup>

The evangelical counsels and marriage, on the other hand, express the inner truth of ecclesial, and finally all human, community. Indeed, as a general matter, we might say that the purpose of the counsels is to show the authentic meaning of “community” to the world, including that most primordial of human communities, marriage. Marriage, for its part, grounds all human community, beginning with the family, the “original cell of society” (GS 12; CCC, 2207; LF 13). As the reflections here have attempted to show, however, it *also* carries within itself the objective (if hidden) meaning of belonging wholly to God in communion with another. Marriage, as the foundation of the family, therefore exists in an irreducible and necessary tension between the “sacred” and the “secular,” within its status as both “original cell of society” and “domestic Church.”

If the counsels and marriage disclose the authentic structure of creaturehood, as well as the meaning of the community creaturehood implies, then they also are called to “reconfigure” the world according to their own structure as communion, by simply being “what they are” *in* the world. What is clarified in the recognition of the fundamental character of the states of life is that, in disclosing the authentic nature of creaturehood, and thereby the authentic relationship between God and the world, they also serve as a privileged entry for God *into* the world and all human community. While it is true that there is an irreducible and infinite difference between the relationship with God and that among humans, it is also true that the “community” indicated in the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, which in itself flows out of trinitarian communion, offers itself analogously as the model for all human community. The role of marriage and the counsels, then, is to bring the basic ecclesial sense of community to the world, to “domesticate” the human

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<sup>54</sup>Again, parceling out clerical roles to the laity does nothing to reverse this situation. Rather it simply widens possession of these roles to include some portion (i.e., the especially devout) of the laity (see fn. 7).

<sup>55</sup>Where this happens, the Church/world opposition devolves into a relationship of parallel structures, which, finally, become indistinguishable. The question then is: do we really need the Church at all? (Schindler, *Heart of the World*, 7).

community and all of creation.<sup>56</sup> Or finally, their “essential purpose” is to “aim at ‘the renewal of creation’: ‘the world’ . . . is to be subjected to man and given to him in such a way that man himself may be perfectly given to God” (RD 9). □

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<sup>56</sup>Cf. David Schindler, “Homelessness and the Modern Condition: The Family, Community, and the Global Economy,” *Communio* 27 (Fall 2000): 420.