

EVANGELICAL COUNSELS IN MARRIAGE?

• Jörg Splett •

“I and Thou do not belong simply to each other. Each of them has to share the other with God. This involves all three counsels. And it finds new application in relation to children.”



I. The Consecrated Life?

1. We have to acknowledge the facts: many people do not expect much from the consecrated life, either for themselves or at all.

It has always been a matter of sober realism to regard the consecrated life as “impossible.” The theologians were making just this point—seriously—when they talked about *grace* and insisted on its special necessity. One could expect something from the consecrated life because one could expect something *for* it, something that transcended one’s own capabilities. As the horizon of supernatural hope fades, one is left only with the natural impossibility.

The fading of this horizon is due to the mentality that Paul Ricœur has traced to the “three Masters of Suspicion,” Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. There is an a priori suspicion of nobility, of the willingness to sacrifice, and of magnanimity; a deep mistrust of any talk about “great love,” especially of a great love for God that changes one’s whole life.

2. The consecrated life is a way of bearing an especially explicit witness to Christ. In 1975, Cardinal Hermann Volk said this to religious women superiors in Germany:

You don't need to join an order to care for the sick or to run schools with a consciously Catholic spirit. In most cases, the majority of personnel in hospitals or schools run by the orders are laypeople. They also want to serve in a Christian and Catholic spirit. This means that it has to be the order itself, and not what it does, that first attracts young people.¹

The decisive service that the orders and consecrated communities offer lies, then, precisely in the testimony of their common life according to the counsels (whether this takes a missionary, charitable, apostolic, contemplative, or other form). No matter that many people don't believe in, or don't expect anything from, the consecrated life. No matter that our contemporaries claim to have more "modest" expectations.

This tension is by no means a modern problem. In the Bible, man's need, expectation, and willingness to follow are directed to the Lord, who guarantees his daily bread (Jn 6:14f). And yet, when the Lord makes the superabundant offer of his own flesh and blood, they would rather be spared (Jn 6:48ff). This is why being of "little faith" (*oligopistia*) is the most disastrous hindrance to the Gospel.

And yet, yearning for great love has not died. Men continue to be swept off their feet when such love happens before their eyes. Ida Friederike Görres makes this point, in the language of her times, in what she calls a "dialogue on holiness" (which has an epigraph from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*):

There is a point in earthly love where everything else, the most valuable and the most difficult alike—parents and home and property and reputation, danger and health and life and death—becomes madly indifferent; a point where one takes insane risks and loses without regret and thinks it not worth a sigh or a second thought. Not self-consciously,

¹"Orden als geistlicher Stand. Zum Bildungskonzept der VOD. H. 4" (Bonn, 1975). N. Lohfink goes so far as to say that lay collaborators threaten an order's witness—precisely when they perform their service well. See N. Lohfink, *Der Geschmack der Hoffnung. Christsein und christliche Orden* (Freiburg, 1983), 101f.

with pride and pleasure in one's own sacrifice, but by-the-by, with the impatient gesture with which one waves away an annoyance. The fact that man's love for God should and really *does* contain this point is something that seems almost inconceivable to us alone.²

It goes without saying that love doesn't appear only in this ecstatic form, that it has to be transformed if it is going to last. And there is no question that we need to take to heart what Luke's Gospel says about reckoning up the cost (14:28ff). But which saint hasn't first been a "foolish saint"? It is the sober philosopher Hegel who tells us that "nothing great is accomplished in this world without passion."³

In this sense, the decisive service that consecrated life performs for the Christian world is its existence as such in the state of the counsels. It is the fact that "in response to today's chronic question, 'what do you do?' says 'I am—and by God's grace at that.'"⁴

II. The Counsels

1. The focus of this essay is not, however, the consecrated life, but the idea of living out the counsels in marriage and family. We can think of this in two basic forms. There is a vowed life for married couples and their children in new forms of ecclesial community. I will not be discussing this possibility here, if for no other reason than my own lack of knowledge and competence. My concern is with the "normal" Christian marriage and family.

I will also refrain from discussing the concept of "counsel," especially since Jesus made many other "very clear and universal statements that are often overheard."⁵ There are, nevertheless, intrinsic reasons for the development of *three* vows in the Middle Ages (but not

²Ida Friederike Görres, *Gespräch um die heilige Elisabeth* (Frankfurt, 1932), 58f. The epigraph from Nietzsche: "I love those who don't know how to live unless they are going under, because they're the ones who are passing over" (KSA 4, 17).

³WW (Glockner) 11, 52.

⁴Kurt Koch, *Gottes Schönheit Leben* (Freiburg, 2000), 13.

⁵"Evangelische Räte," in K. Rahner and H. Vorgrimler, *Kleines theologisches Wörterbuch*, 10th ed. (1976).

yet, for example, in the Rule of Saint Benedict). The fundamental attitude embodied in the three vows is one that for all Christians, indeed, for all human beings, isn't just an optional recommendation, but a necessary condition for a life of flourishing.

This is a point that Zulehner, more than anyone else, has restored to clarity in his book.⁶ Zulehner starts with man's natural desire to have a name, power, and a home. He then shows that these primordial desires are intrinsically measureless. On this basis, finally, he gives an account of the spirit of the renunciation of marriage, power, and property—as modes of *cultivating* the fundamental desires.

Paul Ricoeur speaks of a striving for property, dominion, and recognition:

It is remarkable that the self is never secure. The three-fold longing in which it seeks itself is never wholly fulfilled. As long as pleasure is a sort of transitory rest, in Aristotle's concise formulation, and as long as the distinctive character of beatitude is precisely that it is an abiding rest, the spirit is restless. Insofar as the "heart" is spirit in the sense of *thymós*, the heart is by definition the restless part of me. When will I have enough? When will my authority be securely enough established? When will I be sufficiently esteemed and acknowledged? Is there ever any "enough" in all these things? Between the finitude of pleasure, which closes a well-defined act and crowns it with rest, and the infinity of happiness, the mind places an indefinite something that brings with it the peril that attaches to an endless drive.⁷

This dissatisfaction and lack of peace threaten the center of man's being and tempt him to inhumanity. Interpreters have always found this danger in Jesus' three-fold temptation, with varying emphases and methods of self-application. The principal points of reference are certain, however: (a) the It-relation in the first temptation—having; (b) the Thou-relation on the pinnacle of the Temple (being esteemed—I like to think of the way that the beloved's look of

⁶See also his article in the *Prakt. Lexikon der Spiritualität*.

⁷Paul Ricoeur, *Die Fehlbarkeit des Menschen. Phänomenologie der Schuld*, I (Freiburg and Munich, 1971), 165.

affirmation “supports” one)—being-with;⁸ (c) the I-relation, “autocracy” offered in the form of world dominion (in the two-fold sense of “autocracy”: rule of the self, rule over the self⁹)—self-being.¹⁰

In all these relations, the Christian has to live as if he didn’t live (1 Cor 7:29–31)—which has nothing to do with Stoic detachment or Rilke’s “being always already dead,”¹¹ but rather with a life set free in the spirit of freedom. Can such a life succeed if I remain fundamentally within the horizon of wishes and needs (merely tempering them through stylization)—or mustn’t I fundamentally overturn this perspective so that what counts is an *answer* to a call?

My point is not that we should repudiate needs and wishes, but only that we should read them, too, as a response. As a response to the beings that await their name from us, as Rilke—echoing Genesis 2:19f—says;¹² that want to be found beautiful, and good, and desirable by us (or, to put it less poetically: to those by whom God wants to please us, since he gives them to us). A response to human beings, who, and this is no longer a metaphor, desire to be desired, or, more

⁸Even the temptation to suicide, which Eugen Biser makes the subject of his witty reflections (*Dasein auf Abruf. Der Tod als Schicksal, Versuchung und Aufgabe* [Düsseldorf, 1981], 82–87; Biser focuses on Luke 4:1–13, where the temptation to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple is the third Jesus has to undergo), can, I think, be fitted without violence into this “dialogical” scheme.

⁹See Karol Wojtyła, *Person und Tat* (Freiburg, 1981), II, 3, on the self-belonging and self-mastery of the person (121).

¹⁰A query, this, to Erich Fromm’s famous either/or between being versus having. See on this point J. Splett, “Haben—Sein,” in *Zeitschrift für medizinische Ethik* 47 (2001): 433–436.

¹¹See number 13 in the second part of the *Sonnets to Orpheus*. “*Sei allem Abschied voran . . . Sei immer tot in Euridike*” [be ahead of every goodbye. . . Be always dead in Eurydice].

¹²“[Sie] zu sagen, versteht, / oh zu sagen so, wie selber die Dinge niemals / innig meinte zu sein. . . . Und diese von Hingang / lebenden Dinge verstehen, daß du sie rühmst; vergänglich / traun sie ein Rettendes uns, den Vergänglichsten, zu” [to say them, understand this, / oh, to say them thus, more inwardly than the things themselves / ever imagined they’d be. . . . And these things / that live on passing away, they understand that you’re honoring them; transitory / they trustfully await from us, the most transitory ones of all, a saving word] (*Duino Elegies*, 9). For a broader (less exclusively private-mythical and mythopoetic) development of the same idea, see H. Kuhn, “Dichten heißt Rühmen,” in *Schriften zur Ästhetik* (Munich, 1966), 236–264.

deeply, acknowledged, named by name (Zulehner).¹³ A response also with regard to my own self, so that my (self-)development would have to be seen as a form of service, as Guardini has it: “my human person is nothing but how I am called by God and how I am to answer his call.”¹⁴

With this, however, there comes (in the words of Levinas) an inversion of need’s wanting (*besoin*) into yearning (*désir*)—to be able to respond ever better.

On this point, I venture the following formulation with respect to the Thou-relation:

To hold oneself back so as to let the other be while, at the same time, being most intensively concerned about him: that I should like to call the “moment of celibacy” within marriage, and, according to the mind of the Church’s Tradition, it is made especially visible in the charism of the evangelical counsels. (Which does not mean that this is the only, or even just the true, meaning of that form of life, with its unlimited availability for God’s call.)¹⁵

One could propose analogous formulations for the other dimensions of relationship. In this respect, then, life in the counsels helps Christians—with example, encouragement, and support—by making visible in an “institutional”-existential form what holds for all of them (in particular, by-the-bye, for priests, who therefore need particular help and support, both from married couples and consecrated people).

2. On the other hand, it would not be good to blur the distinction between the “spirit” and the concrete living out of the counsels. This becomes clearest—once again—in the case of the second counsel. Its very name—whether one calls it “virginity” or “celibacy”—unequivocally contradicts the sacramental vocation called “marriage.”

¹³A persistent theme in Lessing’s *Golden Notebook* is the expectation of being “named” on the appropriate level.

¹⁴Romano Guardini, *Der Herr. Betrachtungen über die Person und das Leben Jesu Christi*, 14th ed. (Paderborn, 1950), 42.

¹⁵Jörg Splett, *Der Mensch ist Person*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt, 1986), 136.

Beyond the prophetic *exemplification* of Christian *freedom as such*, the life of the counsels possesses, it seems to me, a specific form of this freedom, which I understand as being *complementary* to the form of life of the “ordinary Christian,” which is also and equally specific.

The easiest way to get at what I mean is through discussion of the problem of the unity of love of God and love of neighbor (once again, then, I will be starting from the second vow—and not by chance, since without it the other two can be lived only with reservations, already with respect to the couple, but most of all with respect to the child). I hope I may refer to an earlier account of these matters, which I presented under the inspiration of Richard of Saint Victor.¹⁶

Richard rejects the sort of either-or that has often been represented in the Tradition. He also goes beyond Rahner’s attempt to reunite love of God as the transcendental principle and love of neighbor as its categorical instantiation.¹⁷ Instead, Richard sees love as being, in principle, an interplay of three:

When two love each other mutually, and lavish on each other the affection of supreme desire, and the affection of the one tends to the other, and vice versa, as it were to two diverse objects, there is love on both sides, but not joint love [*condilectio*]. But one can speak rightly of joint love only when by two a third is loved harmoniously, in the bosom of their sharing, and the affection of the two is fused into one by the fire of the love of the third.¹⁸

This primordial trinitarian form is reflected in a relation having the form I-Thou-God. The couple does not exclude the third, nor

¹⁶Jörg Splett, “Über die Einheit von Nächsten- und Gottesliebe—Laienhaft (Idiota de unitate. . .)” in *Wagnis der Theologie. Erfahrungen mit der Theologie Karl Rahners*, ed. H. Vorgrimler (Freiburg, 1981), 299–310.

¹⁷Karl Rahner, “Über die Einheit von Nächsten- und Gottesliebe,” in *Schriften zur Theologie*, VI (Einsiedeln, 1965), 277–298; *Glaube, der die Erde liebt. Christliche Besinnung im Alltag der Welt* (Freiburg, 1966), 85–95. Cf. L.B. Puntel, “Zu den Begriffen ‘transzendental’ und ‘kategorial’ bei Karl Rahner,” in Vorgrimler, *Wagnis der Theologie*, 189–198.

¹⁸Richard of Saint Victor, *De Trinitate* III, 19. To put it in another “structural formula” of mine (“Über die Einheit von Nächsten- und Gottesliebe—Laienhaft,” 307): Every “We” is the higher unity of the “I-Thou-Encounter” of two, of a “We-He-In-One” (as the opening of their Encounter), and a “We-Thou-Relation” (as the fulfillment of this being-in-one—and this fulfillment then re-confirms their first I-Thou).

does it close itself to him, but rather gives him space in their mutuality. The two experience their oneness in this fact of being there for him, and they rejoice in it, just as they rejoice in their duality, because it is a double love for him. The third, for his part, does not simply receive their turning towards him as a gift; he rejoices at the same time to serve their oneness in receiving this gift.

This happening becomes (inter-)play in the full sense, however, insofar as each joins with every other to form a We-Couple vis-à-vis the respective third, and, at the same time, each, as a third, mediates the oneness of the others. Each acts selflessly as the “friend of the Bridegroom” (Jn 3:29), and each equally celebrates his own wedding (here the images break down).

And yet, this play admits two “base tonalities,” or predominant “prioritizations.” The defining accent of marital spirituality is placed on the fact that the spouses stand before God together and approach him in dual unity—even though each one cares for the other with God, on the one hand, while also “accepting” precisely the other’s mystery with God and their—God’s and the other’s— common care for *him*. The basic emphasis lies on the couple’s being-in-one.¹⁹

The celibate form of life, on the other hand, should not be unfavorably compared to the first as a sort of a-cosmic “flight of the alone to the alone.”²⁰ Rather, it should be seen in the same fullness of, and tension between, love of God and love of man (or world)—but in the fundamental key of “being-with-God-towards-the-others.” This despite the fact that the one consecrated to God, “taken from among men” (Heb 5:1), stands together with them before God. The basic accent here is: with God, contemplatively in the We-They of common care (in the spirit of the high-priestly prayer), apostolically in the We-Thou of loving attention to neighbor.

¹⁹Having become one through this being-in-one, they are then able to open up a new “triad” “jointly with God”: towards children, friends, the parish, and so on. I will not develop this point in detail. I mention it simply to obviate the appearance of self-enclosed privacy. Moreover, this new trinity shows the change of “key” that we are about to discuss.

²⁰Plotinus, *Enneads* VI, 9, 11.

What I have just sketched a propos of the second vow could be developed analogously in terms of the It and the I relations.²¹ In the process, it should become clear that the spirituality of the counsels is not only an exemplification or “radicalization” of the Christian Thing as such, but also a complement to a lay Christianity, lived out in the world, with a correspondingly specific form of its own. Until now, there has been little awareness of this, because a specifically lay piety has been greatly underdeveloped. For centuries, it was monastic spirituality abbreviated (in Latin: *breviarium*). Since the Reformation, it has been, in part, a mere counter-movement (“marriage as a worldly thing”). And I fear that council and synod have not done enough to change the situation (even as I remain disgusted by the forced reactivity on evidence in theological manifestoes in favor of “intimacy” or “erotic culture”).²²

3. If this is the case, however, we cannot rest content with seeing the two states as complements and alternatives. The fundamental tonalities of a life lived as an I-Thou-in-One towards God and a life lived as a communion with God towards whichever Thou has been sent one’s way are not on the same level and are not natural in the same way. It is high time to bid farewell to the language of *counsels* in order to speak, from now on, of a free, underivable *call* from God.

My point is not that we should reopen the old debate about the “state of perfection,” much less that we should discuss the misunderstandings—which, I should think, have at last been cleared up—about the perfection of the individual.²³ Of course, every

²¹For a first (although not counsel-specific) approach, see Jörg Splett, *Wagnis der Freude. Meditationen zu Worten der Schrift und Zeichen der Kunst*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt, 1984), 31–53, esp. 41ff and 50ff.

²²It is thus all the more important to call attention to the International Academy for Marital Spirituality: INTAMS (Sint-Genesius-Rode, Belgium) under the direction of Aldegonde Brenninkmeijer-Werhahn, which, alongside other activities, has, since 1995, been publishing the *Intams Review*. See also A. Wollbold, “Fehlt eine Spiritualität der Ehe,” *Geist und Leben* 75 (2000): 183–192.

²³On the theology of the secular institute, see above all Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Gottberaites Leben. Der Laie und der Ordensstand* (Einsiedeln, 1993). Manfred Scheuer rightly warns against the sort of comparison that perverts the counsels: “the poor man who claims to be better, happier, and so forth than people who are chained to the world is in the end not poor; the man under obedience who, while he is humbly submitting himself to everyone else, makes a point of comparing

Christian, in the words of Karl Rahner, “is [called] to that perfection of Christian being that bears a title that today awakens mistrust, and yet is ultimately Biblical in its provenance: perfection or holiness.”²⁴ To be sure, the “acceptance of this statement from *Lumen gentium*, which went off without fanfare . . . [may represent] a gigantic event in the history of the Church and of Christian self-understanding” (408) (and there is no doubt that this event has to do with the decline in vocations to the religious life).

Nevertheless, “the simple fact” remains “that man does not normally choose marriage, wealth, and power *because* he loves God,” but rather finds himself before the task of integrating them into a loving relationship with him. The evangelical counsels, however, “are not given as such [!], unless they spring forth from God’s love” (426f). (This does not mean, of course, that there cannot be some sort of foundation for the counsels in the inner structure of human nature.)

The book’s title is thus right on the mark: *Leidenschaft für Gott* [Passion for God]. Rahner puts it in stark terms: “the bird in the bush is truly believed only when one lets go of the bird in the hand—and, indeed, before the bird in the hand is taken away and before one grasps the bird in the bush” (423). Bishop Kamphaus, citing Nelly Sachs, speaks of dwelling in the midst of the “wound between day and night”—and thus refers to Holy Saturday, which is the center of Balthasar’s theology.²⁵ Bernardin Schellenberger has expressed the same idea with the image of the “prophet in the hole.”²⁶

More is meant here than a fashionable either-or. And it has to become evident that more is meant. Religious do not do laypeople

himself to them, subtly turns obedience into an instrument of domination. . . . The celibate man who is busy demonstrating his superiority to the married is no longer what he claims to be: virginally ready and open” (*Die evangelischen Räte. Strukturprinzip systematischer Theologie bei H. Ü. von Balthasar; K. Rahner, J.B. Metz und in der Theologie der Befreiung* [Würzburg, 1989], 382).

²⁴Karl Rahner “Über die evangelischen Räte,” in *Schriften zur Theologie*, VII (Einsiedeln, 1966), 404–434; 405. Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 39–42.

²⁵*Leidenschaft für Gott* (Freiburg, 1981) 185. Of Balthasar’s works, I limit myself to citing only *Theologie der drei Tage*, 2nd ed. (Einsiedeln, 1990), esp. 141–176; “Pneuma und Institution,” in *Pneuma und Institution* (Einsiedeln, 1974), 201–235; *Theodramatik*, II, 379–395; *Theodramatik*, IV, 442–446. For a summary see texts 79 and 90 in M. Kehl and W. Löser, *In der Fülle des Glaubens* (Freiburg, 1980).

²⁶Bernardin Schellenberger, *Ein anderes Leben. Was ein Mönch erfährt* (Freiburg, 1980), 20ff.

any favors when, as belated penance for their earlier contempt, they darken the light of their vocation. (What sort of “figure” individuals and communities “cut” in this light is another question—which, by the way, may constitute another temptation to put the light under a bushel-basket.)

About twenty-five years ago, I had the privilege of preaching at the first Mass of a student and friend of mine. Let me cite this passage, whose applicability to a wider audience should be obvious:

My dear fellow Christians, instead of a sketch of the priestly *ethos*, let this layman speak openly to laypeople about *our* attitude towards the priest. A lot of people are glad that they have not gotten the call, because God’s grace, like every great thing, is hard. But let’s not fool ourselves. The priest doesn’t serve God in our place. No, he serves God by reminding us of our service and our duties. He does this already just by being there, but he also does it in an explicit manner, in season and out of season. Others envy him his vocation. This is because God’s grace, for all its hardness, obviously contains a kernel of glory. Today this sort of *ressentiment* goes mostly by the name of criticism of the official Church, and echoes in slogans like “maturity” and “democratization.”²⁷

Let me, in all “parrhesia,” contradict Paul: if Christ weren’t risen from the dead—if, then, we were not to rise from the dead—then it would not be just Christians who would be “more pitiable than all other men” (1 Cor 15:19). This would be the case to an even greater degree for every ethically committed person. As Kant puts it in a journal entry (R 4256): “if I deny God’s existence, then I have to regard myself either as a fool if I also want to be (or am) an honest man or as a villain if I want to be a clever one.”

Let no one repeat the objection, voiced not just by Camus, that it is better to be deceived than to be a deceiver. Even worse off, though, would be those who have faithfully lived out the witness of an eschatological faith and hope in the form of a renunciation of “dwelling with,” of being sheltered and at home with another human being.

²⁷Jörg Splett, “Primiz-Ansprache eines Laien,” *Erdkreis* 31 (1981): 195.

III. Marriage in the Spirit of the Counsels

1. “The evangelical renunciations,” writes Bishop Kurt Koch, “are to be understood as concretizations of the message of the First Letter of John that all love originates from God, that God always loves us first, and that our human love can only be the response to God’s prior love for us men.” Bishop Koch then cites the words of Cardinal Suhard, the founder of the “Mission de Paris” and the “Mission de France”: “being a witness isn’t about spreading propaganda. It isn’t even about shaking people up. It’s about being a living mystery. It means living in such a way that our life would be meaningless if God didn’t exist.”²⁸

This does not mean, as people are always afraid it does, that all fulfillment is postponed until the afterlife. Every form of life, including the consecrated state, can, and should, be lived without regret, in a spirit of plenitude, as a constituent of one’s identity and in the deep joy that such identity gives.

Need I really fear that someone will misunderstand me when I speak of joy (still, Jesus did speak of the “hundredfold” [Mt 19:29])? We should neither join Nietzsche—who knew nothing of the “sadness” of “not being a saint”—in challenging those called to “look more redeemed,” nor, on the other side, should we prolong the life of a bad doloristic mysticism that forgets that, as one Tzaddik put it, “even the lowest pleasure mirrors God’s joy, while even the noblest suffering is . . . a consequence of sin.”²⁹

²⁸Koch, *Gottes Schönheit leben*, 30, 60. It is in this spirit that Erhard Kunz defines the counsels as the call to God’s love, hearing God’s love, and acting out of God’s love (in participation in Jesus’ sonly dependence and prayer, in his listening to the Father’s word to him, in his breaking out to others in the Spirit). See Kunz’s *Gott finden in allen Dingen* (Frankfurt, 2001), esp. 252–256.

²⁹I. F. Görres, *Zwischen den Zeiten* (Olten and Freiburg, 1960), 139f.—Nietzsche, *Menschliches-Allzumenschliches*, II, 98; *Morgenröte*, IV, 411; *Zarathustra*, II (on priests) (KSA 2, 418; 3, 255; 4, 118).—Sadness: J. and R. Maritain, ed., L. Bloy, *Der beständige Zeuge Gottes* (Salzburg, 1953), 336–339 (La Femme pauvre). For the same reason, I would like to call special attention to Albert Ziegler’s lovely *Das Glück Jesu* (Stuttgart, 1977). On the other hand, precisely the call to perfection requires a corresponding familiarity with failure, a familiarity that is universally human, but also particularly Christian. The core of this familiarity can be found in the experience of Saint Jerome that Michael Schneider recounts in the following passage: “He had surrendered his whole life to God. But when he came to the crib in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve . . . he prayed ‘Lord, I come before you

Altogether different is the kind of love that refuses to have it any better than the beloved. But it is just this love that will radiate the “severe” enchantment of “great joy”—so much so that even the Cross will “attract” (Jn 12:32). Why? Because of the lover’s surrender, even when he himself (occasionally) should experience nothing but abandonment.³⁰ Or do we think that He would let himself be outdone by anyone in magnanimity?

2. But perhaps one should remain silent about such ultimate (or intimate) things. Yet the reader deserves at least a few catchwords about the “life of the counsels” in marriage.

Regarding “celibacy” or “virginity” (I acknowledge that the word is inadequate): we have already talked about *amor benevolentiae* (which goes beyond desire [itself a desirable thing, to be sure]). It shows up not least in the gift of letting oneself be given gifts, in a gratitude that never takes for granted, and, highest of all, in a forgiveness that doesn’t trumpet its own magnanimity. Perhaps we could add that being “good” in this sense (“*ti voglio bene*”) is the opposite of any sort of “condescension.”

In the classical marriage ceremony, it is the *bride* who promises obedience. It goes without saying, though, that obedience works in the other direction, too. Obedience: to accept or do something at the

today with empty hands, what can I give you?—Then Jesus asked the saint for something he never would have thought of himself: ‘Give me your sins’” (*Das neue Leben. Geistliche Erfahrungen und Wegweisung* [Freiburg, 1987], 42).

³⁰On not wanting to have it better, see Acts 5:41; Meister Eckhart’s “tale” (borrowed from Herand of Wildonia) about the man who wanted to be one-eyed like his wife: D. Mieth, ed., *Meister Eckhart. Gotteserfahrung und Weg in die Welt* (Olten and Freiburg, 1979), 135; the homily “Ave gratia plena” (*Deutsche Werke* [Quint], 2, 486–506). Severe joy: Seneca, *Ad Lucil.* III 2 (23): “*magnum gaudium res severa*” [a hard thing is a great joy]. On this latter point, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Die Freude und das Kreuz,” in *Die Wahrheit ist symphonisch. Aspekte des christlichen Pluralismus* (Einsiedeln, 1972), 131–146 [for an English translation, see “Joy and the Cross,” *Communio* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2004)]. Let me cite Léon Bloy once again: “Yes, I will be happy, even very happy, but only on the day when I’ve finally and resolutely exchanged all enjoyment for joy” (H. Kuhmann, ed., *Die Stimme, die in der Wüste ruft* [Recklinghausen, 1951], 255 [Le Mendiant Ingrat]).—For this reason we would have to query the Tzaddik’s words about the “noblest suffering”; or are we really to think that it is only a consequence of original sin that lovers should “find each other sufferable” [*einander leiden mögen*]?

word of another. “In humility let each one regard the other as higher than himself” (Phil 2:3). Which has nothing to do with play-acting, but with acting—and not just thinking. Action doesn’t tolerate play-acting.

We can formulate the following universal principle: for the “I,” his hunger, thirst, desire, pleasure, and so forth are first a “physical” matter, while those of the “Thou” are first a “moral” one. (I am to give to others of what is mine, but not take what is theirs; the others are “widows and orphans,” not I. Conversely, I am the one who has to turn the other cheek, not they. And, in the extreme case: I may never sacrifice another—certainly not for myself; but perhaps I not only may, but must sacrifice—myself.) All of this, moreover, I have to do for the neighbor who is, literally, right next to me.

Poverty for the married consists, first of all, in generous sharing of common income and possessions. This does not exclude “private property,” by the way, but rather expressly includes it. In other words, each one can take from the common “petty cash”—so as to have the means to give the other (and others) a gift. (The right to have is ancillary to the ability to give to the point of giving even oneself. This holds for the possession of things, of one’s own bodiliness, and even of the preserve of one’s person and its mystery.)³¹

Poverty does not concern only I and Thou, but transcends them. It becomes an affair of the couple as such in their relation to children. No one lives for himself.³²

3. With that we are brought back once more to the discovery of Richard of Saint Victor. I and Thou do not belong simply to each other. Each of them has to share the other with God. This involves all three counsels. And it finds new application in relation to children.

Werner Bergengruens has given this an especially fine expression in one of his poems:

I’m not yours, you aren’t mine.
There’s no owning between us.

³¹On this point, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Das Weizenkom* (Einsiedeln, 1958), 77: “it is a beautiful thing that among friends one can be silent about many things without troubling their accord. That’s harder between spouses.”

³²I take the liberty of referring one last time to my own work: “Familie in christlich-philosophischer Sicht,” in A. and G. Beestermöller, *Hält Gott seine Hand über die Liebe?* (Münster, 2002), 12–36.

You've taken me in fief,
I've done the same with you.

So let it be, then:
Help me, dearest fief,

That all my days
I may hold you, my charge, in faith,

And, at the last threshold,
Return you to the Lord intact.³³

And won't he, like the Lord of the talents, entrust us to each other precisely definitively—as a “greater task (and gift)” (Mt 25)?
—*Translated by Adrian J. Walker.*

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³³“*Ich bin nicht dein, du bist nicht mein./Keiner kann des andern sein//Hast du mich nur zu Lehn genommen,/hab zu Lehn dich überkommen.//Also mag's geschehn:/Hilf mir liebstes Lehn,//daß ich alle meine Tage/treulich dich zu Lehen trage//und dich einstmals vor der letzten Schwelle/unversehrt dem Lehnsherrn wiederstelle*”: “Zu Lehen: (Die heile Welt 1950, 1978),” in *Gestern fuhr ich Fische fangen* (Zurich, 1992), 141.