

CELIBACY IN MATTHEW 19:10-12
A JUDEO-CHRISTIAN APPROACH

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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

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INTRODUCTION

Few words of scripture may be expected to encounter such incomprehension today as the logion of Matthew 19:12. The overall purpose of this study is exegetical--to determine the meaning of the Matthean text:

For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it. (Mt 19:12, RSV).

That life consecrated to God in the single state developed early in the Church and continues to this day is a fact. The problem here is: Did Christ really intend this--that some should go a lifetime without wife or husband and children? According to Genesis God said, "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gn 2:18), and in the Old Testament marriage is the normal state. Now, in the New Testament, Christ seems to have offered another possibility. Two basic questions are therefore asked of Matthew 19:10-12: Do the words of Christ really call some men to celibacy? And if so, what is involved in such a commitment?

The literature on celibacy falls into three main categories: Studies in the History of Religions provided the background to the notion of celibacy both in the ancient Near East generally and in Israel. Commentaries on and interpretations of Matthew and especially of Mt 19:10-12

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formed the basis of the exegesis. The discussion of modern theologians on celibacy, as related to Mt 19:12, rounded out several key concepts. There was, of course, considerable overlapping of the three fields. The presentation of the research follows the same general lines: background, exegesis, theological discussion.

Because there is so little reference to celibacy in the New Testament it was thought necessary to turn back to the Old Testament and even back beyond that to see if ancient man, as encountered on clay tablet and through the reconstructions of archeology, had any inkling of the concept of the celibate life from a religious motive. What was his attitude toward human sexuality--toward love, marriage, and procreation? The answer bears directly on the topic for, obviously, if there were no sex there would be no marriage--and, no celibacy. Marriage and celibacy: The New Testament cannot discuss the one without the other. Apparently the Old Testament could and the Nations especially could, those peoples of the ancient Fertile Crescent, whose attitudes and vocabularies influenced and even prepared the way for our present understanding of life and love, marriage or celibacy.

In the introductory chapters we discuss myth and ritual and the attitudes they reveal toward sex in a religious context. Next we discuss vocabulary ('almāh,

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bethula, parthenos, and eunuch) and its indications of this attitude in everyday life. We notice that the Hebrew scriptures, and especially Genesis 1 and 2, demonstrate a very different approach to the concepts of the holy, and of the holy as applied to sexuality, from that of the pagan.

Further, it was important for our study to indicate a growth in the Hebrew concept of holiness according to Law. Practical legislation regarding marriage and continence, as it touched the lives of men and women, was the result, and this is recorded in the Mishnah. Another, and more startling development which required extensive treatment involved the Essenes. There is much written about this sect but few solid conclusions are established regarding their notion and particular practice of continence.

Our third and central chapter deals first with Matthew's Gospel in general. The questions of redaction, outside influences on, and characteristics of the First Gospel are introduced only to the extent that they help to clarify 19:10-12. Attention is always directed to the purpose of the study: To arrive at an understanding of what Mt 19:10-12 has to say regarding celibacy.

The exegesis of our pericope is presented in three sections, verse by verse. Key words and phrases are given separate treatment in the interests of maximum lucidity. The study is based on the conclusions of scholars who have

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made a special study of Matthew. Many of these mention Mt 19:10-12 only in passing. Standard ideas, often expressed in the same words from book to book, indicate that the passage has not been thought out anew. This apparent lack of interest could have two causes: Either the meaning is obvious and does not call for new discussion and original forms of expression, or it is difficult and the author does not care, at this time, to develop discussion on the passage.

The final chapter covers the same ground as the exegesis in Chapter III, but this time studying the material from a different angle. Mt 19:10-12 is discussed now in relation to marriage with reference to certain key concepts which are found to be present in the text: interior dedication, motivation, decision, freedom, permanence, virginity. These ideas come together in a definition of Christian celibacy which really differs not at all from that derived in Chapter III. The discussion is based principally on four books and articles written recently, with further reference to other works of modern theologians. In this way we are able to assure the fullest treatment of the pericope.

CHAPTER I

REMOTE BACKGROUND TO THE NOTION OF CELIBACY

1. Remote Background Among the Nations.-

That which is most enduring in man, the deepest aspects of his reality, are revealed through symbol.¹ In fact, they seem to defy other means of knowledge and other forms of communication. Symbol is prior to language and to discursive reasoning both for the individual and for mankind as a whole. Symbols and myths may seem to lose their form, become confused and garbled at a certain historical moment but only because men have lost the power to read them. This is a tragedy for man is revealed in his myths. Particularly true is this of man in his loving:

for, except in the modern world, sexuality has everywhere and always been a hierophany, and the sexual act an integral action (therefore also a means to knowledge).²

In their knowing³ a certain solidarity among men--Canaanite,

1 Eliade, Mircea, Images and Symbols, translated by Philip Maret, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1961, p. 9-16.

2 Ibid., p. 14.

3 Gaster, Theodor H., Thespis, Myth and Drama in the Ancient Near East, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1961, p. 12. "certain rudimentary reactions to the rhythms of nature and the succession of the seasons characterize virtually all men...". p. 13.

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Hittite, Egyptian, is evident in the pattern of their celebration of life's major events. It was in myth that the early community of men was able to acknowledge the mysterious and to locate itself in the cosmos of birth and death, of plentiful harvest and destructive storm.

All of life⁴ seemed, somehow, rooted in the principle of fertility, explainable in terms of human sexuality. Food and drink, and sexual intercourse were the spontaneous symbols of community with the divine as well as the means whereby human potency became operative. The season-fertility rituals⁵ had a functional purpose, to revive and render present the topocosm of the world of men; the accompanying myths presented that function in terms, ideal and enduring, as it existed in the world of the gods. In ritual men do what in myth the gods do--and, the results are the same.

a) In Myth⁶--A Holy but Non-integrated Concept of Sex.-- The several expressions of sexuality, at once cosmic and sacred, are illuminated in myth. Tales of fecundity

⁴ Van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, Vol. 1, translated by J.E. Turner, New York, Harper and Row, 1963, p. 230.

⁵ Gaster, Op. Cit., p. 17 and 77.

⁶ Grelot, Pierre, Man and Wife in Scripture, translated by Rosaleen Brennan, London, Burns and Oates, 1964: The three types of fertility myth are freely summarized from p. 15-22. Also see James, E. O., Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East, An Archaeological and Documentary Study, London, Thames and Hudson, 1958, p. 113-128.

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celebrate the union of heaven and earth in which the goddess-mother, Earth, is made fertile by god-father, Sky. Thus is he related to the storm: Rain is the fertilizing sperm which causes the germination of plants in the womb of the earth-mother. Very many variations on this theme are found around the Crescent, for example: In the pantheon of the Canaanites of Ugarit the chief god El fertilizes two wives (or rapes two women) who give birth to sons Dawn and Nightfall.

The second expression of sex exemplified in myth is passionate love. The god and goddess-lover are not necessarily the same as are met in the myth of fecundity since procreation was not seen as a consequence of love. Love, both as an emotion and as a physical desire, is justified and hallowed in itself:

All male lovers live within the powerful aura of Ishtar, Aphrodite or Venus; it is her presence that they find in every woman for their joy or misery, since love brings alternately salvation and death.⁷

Third is the sacred marriage, the hieros gamos of

7 Grelot, Op. Cit., p. 21.

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the gods and archetype of all weddings. A myth⁸ of Hurrite origin tells of the marriage of Nikkal, Great Lady of the Sumerians, and the moon-god.

Though love, marriage, and fecundity are clearly appreciated in symbol, they seem to be unrelated experiences. For example⁹: In a fertility myth Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth, marries the Shepherd-god Dumuzi and shortly mourns his death. Dumuzi incarnated the powers of spring and symbolized the decline of nature through his birth and death. From Inanna all life originated; the male god was born from her, became her husband, and fathered her son. For only through the union of male and female can reproduction be maintained and the fruitful cycle of the seasons be guaranteed. The point¹⁰, in our context, is that life experiences are not integrated into a vital union, but are hallowed separately. There does not seem to be, in

⁸ Albright, William Foxwell, From the Stone Age to Christianity, Monotheism and the Historical Process, Baltimore, John Hopkins, 1940, p. 159-161: The second millenium saw much intertranslation of Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Syrian literatures with an internationalization of religion in Western Asia. For example: About 15c B.C. the Hurrite hymn to the Babylonian goddess Nikkal was translated into North Canaanite at Ugarit. A sharing of gods resulted.

⁹ James, E.O., Op. Cit., p. 113-115: Inanna is the Sumerian counterpart of the Accadian Ishtar. The myth dates from about 3000 B.C.

¹⁰ Grelot, Op. Cit., p. 22.

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myth, an ideal and normative proposal for marital relationships. Thus celibacy could not be conceived of as an alternative to marriage since marriage itself had not yet reached maturity in its interrelated aspects of love, consecration, and fecundity.

b) In Ritual--The Use and Non-use of Sex in a Religious Context.— The rites¹¹ of primitive societies provide in an active way a real link with the world of the gods and make holy life functions. In this, sexuality is the obvious symbol for the mysteries of creation and generation and a sexual ritual the natural mode of celebration. The king, in an act of sympathetic magic, representing his city in his cultic union with the 'goddess' chosen for the occasion, called forth fecundity on all--men, animals, and growing things alike. In the cult of the goddess-lover, a religious integration of sexuality was sought through the union of men with the ritual prostitutes in their sanctuary, "the dwelling of the gods".¹² The holiness of the setting passed to the sex act which was made holy for all time.

¹¹ Ringgren, Helmer and Åke V. Ström, Religions of Mankind Today and Yesterday, edited by J.C.G. Grieg, translated by Neils L. Jensen, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1967, p. xxxvi-xxxviii. See also Grelot, Op. Cit., p. 23-24.

¹² Ringgren and Ström, Op. Cit.: "One temple is simply called 'the link between heaven and earth'." p. 63.

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In the New Year rite,¹³ "When Ninlil lies with Enlil, rain begins to fall," marriage regenerated the year, conferred fecundity, and all good fortune.

Ancient Semitic religions were able to see power in fecundity and power in virginity and, apparently, no contradiction¹⁴ even in the union of the two in one symbolic person. To this effect¹⁵ an Egyptian text of the New Empire speaks of "the great goddesses who conceive but do not bear," who are virginal but none the less fruitful. While virginity and fertility are characteristic traits of the goddess, emasculation and fecundity are contradictory traits of the god. The eunuch was a key figure in cult during the Bronze Age in Syria, Asia Minor, and at certain time even in Mesopotamia. If the task of ritual was to make really present what was enduring, in the myth men must live the varying roles of god and goddess:

The ancients believed that numerous sacred functions could be performed properly by one who was qualified for them by perfect continence.¹⁶

¹³ Eliade, Mircea, Cosmos and History, The Myth of the Eternal Return, translated by Willard R. Trask, New York, Harper and Row, 1959, p. 26.

¹⁴ Ringgren and Ström, Op. Cit., p. 49.

¹⁵ Albright, Op. Cit., p. 177-179: The goddess of fertility played a greater role among the Canaanites than other ancient people.

¹⁶ Nock, Arthur Darby, "Eunuchs in ancient religions" in Archiv für Religionswissenschaft, Vol. 22-23, 1925, p. 27.

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It is a fact¹⁷ that many rites required the services of virgins living in chastity, children not at the age of puberty, or married people living in continence during the time of their temple service.

Human potency¹⁸ was related to sex life. As such sex was a power to be modified or directed to the community through being celebrated. There was a conviction of a power being released on the community by the action of the celebrants. The man--king, priest, or stranger, representing the gods and the woman--the devoted person, representing the group. In Babylon there were consecrated women who lived in seclusion until marriage. Either by the sacrifice of sexual intercourse--virginity, or by its opposite--unlimited surrender to the gods (in human form for the ritual) they became brides, harimtu 'the segregated', qadištu 'the consecrated'. In ancient Sumer the women of god were probably put to death, in what was both grave and bridal chamber, as part of the religious celebration. In Corinth the 'hierodules' were credited with saving the city at the time of the Persian Wars by means of their prayers. The Vestal virgins, brides of fire, were a type of order set up to guarantee, by their chastity, the power and

17 Nock, Op. Cit., p. 27.

18 Van Der Leeuw, Op. Cit.: 'Virginity' as a consecration to the gods is freely summarized from p. 230-233.

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well-being of the state.

Thus dedication to god by the sacrifice of virginity either as retained or as given, had taken root in the Greek-Oriental mind before the imperial era. Unrestrained licentiousness was a symbol of power poured forth; abstinence was a 'cultural chastity' whereby power was generated. Marriage with the god was realized in cult by the death of the bride, by virginity retained, or by unlimited surrender in the god's service. In any case the consecration was complete.

Then there¹⁹ was the eunuch who by mutilation rendered himself fit for service, and for the salvation of the entire community put himself on a par with the virgin and the child. Chastity such as that of the eunuch was apparently negative, an abstention as of food or drink. Once castrated he could not again be otherwise. Only the service to follow could give the act, pointless in itself, any lasting value:

youths castrate themselves in order to more fittingly offer themselves to the phallic worship.²⁰

19 Van der Leeuw, Op. Cit., p. 233: This author sees the self-mutilation of men in Asia Minor as sadistic, an attempt to approximate to the feminine. If the motive was "for the salvation of the entire community", then this is its value. The motive is positive.

20 Nock, Op. Cit., footnote No. 4, p. 31.

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The eunuch²¹ was not so much one agios 'holy, set apart' as one agnos 'awakening religious respect and filled with strength'.

To the Western Semites²² eunuchs were komer 'members of a class of priests'. An Amarna letter uses the related word kamiru meaning 'eunuch' while the Syriac kumrâ carries the general sense of 'priest'. The sacred minister could be either, or both, male prostitute as well as eunuch-priest. Certainly, in Graeco-Roman times the titles were interchangeable.

It is generally accepted that the peculiar chastity required in the service of the sacred was based more on the idea of an impurity involved in sexual intercourse than on any powers to be found in the virginal. However, purity precepts²³ were chiefly inherited from the ancient, and it would seem universal, idea that certain foods and animals, contact with the dead, certain sexual functions

21 Nock, Op. Cit., footnote No. 1, p. 29.

22 Albright, Op. Cit., p. 179, and especially footnote No. 46, p. 325.

23 Ringgren and Ström, Op. Cit., p. 127 and xxxi. McKenzie, Dictionary of the Bible, p. 141-143, does not totally agree.

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were thought to make one unclean. Such prohibitions²⁴ often arose from ancient medical theory and superstition, but on the whole they compare with our rules of etiquette whose violation today could render one 'unfit' to others that is, tabu.

This special character²⁵ arose from forces, mysterious and frightening, both in things impure and in things sacred, which had the power to act on all they touched. Both the impure and the consecrated were untouchable, and anyone who came into contact became himself untouchable. Both impurity and holiness were physical states which one could acquire and from which one must emerge to re-enter normal life. Therefore, the priest before sacrifice had to leave behind the ordinary--the profane, the unclean. He had to sanctify himself, to wash, put on special clothing, abstain from sexual relations, and eat special food or eat alone. Then through contact with the holy he became holy, and in order to return to ordinary living he must put off, desecrate, his holiness. He had to

²⁴ Finkelstein, Louis; The Pharisees, The Sociological Background of Their Faith, Vol. 1, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1938, p. 27: Many Levitical Laws were rules of health.

²⁵ de Vaux, Roland, Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions, translated by John McHugh, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961, p. 460-61.

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wash, put off his special clothing, and perhaps stay apart from others for a time.

The concept of the profane overlaps with the clearly religious principle of the sacred. One dare not approach without proper preparation; one may come forward confidently only if the right relationship ensured divine blessing.

The eunuch²⁶ was sure of his place near the divine. He had made himself god-like physically as well as in disposition. By his own efforts he was in a sense taken from this world--agnos he had acquired the character of holiness. If such were his motives then it would seem to rival the very sin of paradise: To be like gods.

Nevertheless, there are two points worthy of man's growing sense of the divine: first, the permanence of the consecration--once a eunuch forever a eunuch; second, the 'virgin', particularly, pointed to the fact that both sex used and sex abstained from were capable of bringing man into contact with the divine.

c) Vocabulary of 'Virgin'.-- Through ritual and myth a vocabulary developed in which the concept of the sacred could be expressed. "In many ancient religions virginity

²⁶ Schneider, "εὐνοῦχος and εὐνοῦχισμός", in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel, translated and edited by G.W. Bromiley, Vol. 2, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1964, p. 765. (Hereafter this series is referred to as TWNT.).

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had a special import",²⁷ but just what that import is is not so easy to determine. Anath, Artemis, and Athena are called 'virgin' despite spectacular evidence to the contrary. Clearly, the word as used in the ancient world had a meaning of its own.

In the Ugaritic Epic²⁸ of Karit the young woman, gálmātu, gives birth to a child. The word used is equivalent to the Hebrew 'almāh'. It is also used as the proper name for a goddess, similar to the Canaanite mother-goddess and goddess of fertility, the virgin Anath. Now Anath is the beloved of the god and bears his son. In both the cult and the myth the theme recurs each year so that each year she is greeted anew as the young woman ('almāh), the 'virgin Anath'. The word²⁹ (gálmātu--'almāh) is used of a young unmarried girl, a bride to be, and also paralleled with att, woman or wife. Considering the close literary correspondence between the two languages and the parallels of the Ras Shamra tablets the word 'almāh may be used of any marriageable young woman and may be applied indifferently

27 Léon-Dufour, X., (Ed.), Dictionary of Biblical Theology, translation directed by P. Joseph Cahill, London, Chapman, 1967, p. 559.

28 Mowinckel, Op. Cit., p. 113-114.

29 Vawter, Bruce, "The Ugaritic Use of GLMT", in Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 4, Oct. 1952, p. 319-322.

to one who is or is not a virgin.

The Hebrews³⁰ justly claim the content of the Bible as theirs while granting that the literary medium is from the neighbors: In the Old Testament the Hebrews never call their language 'Hebrew' or 'Israelite' but simply the language of Canaan. The Hebrew word bethulāh is usually translated virgin. But, as was seen in the Ugaritic Texts, the bethulāh Anath is not a virgin. Also, in an Aramaic incantation³¹ a woman having trouble bearing her first child is called betulṭa--the equivalent of the Hebrew bethulāh--and she is, obviously, no longer virgin. In Joel 1:8 the bethulāh would have been married for she mourns the loss of "the husband of her youth"³². It can be argued³³ that the concept of 'virginity' betûlîm is derived from bethulāh

30 Gordon, C.H., Before the Bible, The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilization, London, Collins, 1962, p. 131; Ford, J. Massingherd, A Trilogy on Wisdom and Celibacy, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1967, p. 8-14, confirms this for the Hebrew. The same material is found in "The Meaning of Virgin", New Testament Studies, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1966, p. 293-299.

31 Gordon, Cyrus H., "The Patriarchal Age", in The Journal of Bible and Religion, Vol. 21, No. 4, Oct. 1953, p. 240-243.

32 In the English translation of Joel 1:8 the Knox Version gives 'maid' and the Jerusalem Bible 'virgin'.

33 Brownlee, William Hugh, The Meaning of the Qumrān Scrolls for the Bible with Special Attention to the Book of Isaiah, London, Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 280. See also Vawter, Op. Cit., p. 319.

whereas 'youth' ne'ûrîm or 'alûmîn clearly comes from the synonyms na'arâh and 'almâh. Later, the Mishnah comes along to contradict this with a decided emphasis on youth and physical immaturity in its definition:

Who is accounted a bethula? She that has never yet suffered a flow, even though she was married (Nid. 1:4).³⁴

The authors of the Old Testament realized the ambiguity of the words. Rebekah who is called 'almâh in Gn 24:43 is called bethûlâh in Gn 24:16, and is further described as a girl "no man had known" to make the meaning explicit. It would seem that bethûlâh like the English maid, maiden, means a young woman, a virgin--but not necessarily so. "There is no word in the Near Eastern languages that by itself means virgo intacta".³⁵

Greek and Hebrew culture³⁶ show a parallel development from the same East Mediterranean foundation. Certainly word meaning and usage are no clearer in ancient Greece.

³⁴ Danby, Herbert, The Mishnah, Translated from the Hebrew, London, Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 745.

³⁵ Brownlee, Op. Cit., p. 279, footnote No. 14; Brownlee quotes C.H. Gordon, Ugaritic Manual, No. 1, p.249b.

³⁶ Gordon, Op. Cit., Before the Bible, p. 9; Gordon demonstrates parallels in Homer and Ugaritic literature, and parallels in the Bible and Ugaritic from which he concludes a link between Homer and the Bible. The rewinning of Helen, Sarah, and Hurrai are reflexes of the same cultural impulse, as well as the theme of the divinely promised progeny (p.131-145).

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Parthenos,³⁷ virgin, as early as Homer (Iliad 2:514) may refer to one no longer virgin. Various word forms³⁸ in the Greek support this argument.

ὁ παρθένιος	- the son of an unmarried girl
παρθένιος ἀνὴρ	- the husband of maidenhood--
παρθενικός	first husband
	- spouse of a first marriage

For the Jew, at least, these could not refer to virgines intactae because the primary purpose of marriage was procreation. Certainly, in the context of maidenhood, the Greek parthenos places the accent on age as does the Hebrew 'almāh, or on status as opposed to that of widow--a young unmarried woman. The primary thought³⁹ is of virgin freshness and of beauty in general. From physical purity to the spiritual is short step.

The mythological scene is crowded and there is much overlapping of themes and characters. There is Artemis⁴⁰ emphatically parthenos though not in the sense of a physical virginity retained so much as a constant renewal--fertility is regularly and miraculously regained, Aphrodite of immortal youth and innocence, Hera parthenos again after

37 Gordon, "The Patriarchal Age", Op. Cit., p. 241.

38 Ford, "The Meaning of Virgin", p. 293-294.

39 Delling, A., "παρθένος", IWNT, Vol. 5, p. 827-829.

40 Van der Leeuw, Op. Cit., p. 98.

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each union with Zeus, and Athene 'virgin' because of her origin from father only.

For the Greek, then, the word has the implication of immortality, self-sufficiency and separation. It comprises something of the divine and establishes superiority.⁴¹

When celibacy, whether as a temporary or a permanent obligation, was laid on ministers of the cult it was because of the uniqueness of virginity. Especially when sexual abstinence⁴² was lifelong was there a conviction of a religious power residing in the virgin. Moreover, the priestess lived in marital union with the gods, and it was not fitting that she should have relations with a man; similarly for the priest, cultic purity was the prime factor rendering him fit for service. Sexual abstinence was then a matter of fitness. The celibacy imposed, far from being negative, was a positive step because undertaken in service of the gods for the welfare and prosperity of all.

In primitive societies⁴³ sex was sacred--a bridge of man's inner loneliness. In a society without sacraments,

⁴¹ Delling, Op. Cit., p. 829.

⁴² Delling, Op. Cit., p. 831. Also Van der Leeuw, Op. Cit., particularly regarding power, p. 230-232.

⁴³ Stevens, Anthony M., "Celibacy Belongs to a Sub-Culture, An Anthropological Look at Christian Chastity", in Homiletic and Pastoral Review, Vol. 68, No. 8, May 1968, p. 676.

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temple prostitution was not an ugly thing stemming solely from a desire or a delight in the sordid, rather it was an act of worship. And, because it was performed in a spirit of worship it was bitterly condemned by the prophets of Israel for herein lay its danger to the people of God. As a society evolves, abstention from sex as well as use of sex becomes sacred: For the early Greeks celibacy was a means to contemplation, a sort of philosophical meditation; in the Orient, the Buddhist or Hindu was celibate to achieve a greater union with the divine; but, strangely, in the Old Testament there is little room for the concept till near the end of the era. When the time was come and the motive was right to satisfy Israel's unique concept of God and man some few of her sons felt themselves called to express their response to God in the celibate way.

2. Remote Background in Early Israel.-

The Old Testament⁴⁴ forms a radical departure from the ideological and ritual bias of the rest of the ancient

⁴⁴ Albright, Op. Cit., p. 180 and 212-227. After the Hebrew Patriarchs left their home in Mesopotamia close contact was maintained for several generations. Though they early adopted a local Canaanite dialect there is evidence of Accadian, Hurrian, and Amorite influences in the many parallels of biblical, particularly Genesis 1 and 2, with North Western Mesopotamian literatures. After the conquest the strongest influence was Canaanite, and this influence is apparent in the language and institutions of Israel.

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Near East. Its first book⁴⁵ took final form only after the Babylonian Exile in the fifth century. The context is of course, in antiquity, and it must be interpreted accordingly. An external similarity to the myths popular among contemporary peoples is evident. But, Genesis is not a myth, at least, not in the sense of Enuma Elish; it seems, in part, a polemic against the myths and their polytheistic basis. For example: In the Babylonian myth Tiamât, the primordial ocean, is a goddess over whom Marduk, the god of light, triumphs. Not only does Genesis belittle the myth, but the gods are humiliated: Tiamât loses her personality and is nothing more than the ocean, no longer god but simple, natural reality. The sun, moon, and stars are as neatly disposed of.

a) Unity--Within Man and Among Men.— The biblical accounts⁴⁶ of creation set the origin of sex in God. There is no patience with god and goddess for there is one, the God-Father, without consort and without rival, who is master of all nature and from whom all proceeds. In the language of the Sinaitic religion only one relationship exists, that

⁴⁵ Daniélou, Jean, In the Beginning ... Genesis I-III, translated by Julien L. Randolph, Montreal, Palm, 1962, p. 27-31 freely summarized. Daniélou relies heavily on Paul Humbert, Etudes sur le récit du Paradis et de la Chute dans la Genèse, p. 166.

⁴⁶ Piper, Otto A., The Biblical view of Sex and Marriage, Digswell Place, Welwyn, Herts, 1960, p. 30-33; also Grelot, Op. Cit., p. 28-29.

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of Yahweh and His people Israel. The sexual-ritual myth has no place in such a scheme though, in fact, Israel must struggle throughout her entire history against idolatry, especially in the form of the fertility cult, and this despite the earliest codes with punishments, even of death (Ex 22:18-20; Lv 18:23; Dt 27:21).

In the first account (Gn 2:4-25) the aspect of the man-woman most stressed is their mutual affection. The purpose of creation is companionship. From the first man's enthusiastic and loving response to a mate, one in nature and of equal dignity with himself, expresses the unity of man. Though "male and female he created them" (Gn 1:27), "they became one body" (Gn 2:24).

It is astonishing that, in a society where polygamy was legal, the model for human marriage (cf 2:24) should be a monogamous couple.⁴⁷

The second account (Gn 1-2:4) emphasizes fecundity: "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it" (Gn 1:28). In this first command the purpose of the creation of the sexes lies. The full meaning of sexuality is revealed in the reciprocal personal relationship of man-woman, and in their common social function in the reproduction of children.

⁴⁷ Grelot, Op. Cit., p. 36.

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Love, consecration⁴⁸ (Ho 2:21-22), and procreation can now be interdependent. One man may hope to know all three in a lifetime. The unity achieved in the different spheres of human sexuality is a unity in the human person. Maleness and femaleness reflect the image of God; man and woman become one flesh because of God's creative action.

The perfection⁴⁹ of the human person was conceived of only in the state of matrimony, exception would teach men otherwise--but it would take time. Keenly aware of the nature of love and fecundity the Hebrew wholeheartedly sought it as both a right and a duty, and accepted its fruits as his due reward. So much was this so that virginity was equated with sterility. Such was the sad plight of Jephthah's daughter who was not to see the fulfillment of her womanhood as wife and mother (Jg 11:38). As a virgin⁵⁰ she was nothing, a girl, a female not yet married, still deprived of that union which would give meaning to her existence.

⁴⁸ Moore, George Foot, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, The Age of Tannaim, Vol. 1, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1950: The term for betrothal is kiddushin--hallowing; the act whereby a woman is consecrated to her husband, p. 122.

⁴⁹ Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi and G. Wigoder, The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966, p. 81-82.

⁵⁰ Legrand, Lucien, The Biblical Doctrine of Virginity, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1963, p. 20.

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That men did consider a definitive state of virginity a pity is beyond doubt for it was not death, even death so young, that was bewailed, but the shame of unfulfillment, that is, of barrenness.

However, as is clear from certain outstanding exceptions, sterility did not always mean shame and abandonment--exclusion from God's promises. It was even the occasion of some powerful manifestations of his mercy, and a sign that He is beyond nature and in control of history.

By the mysterious economy of sterile women whom He makes fertile, God wishes to point out that the bearers of the promise have not been raised up by the normal procedure of fruitfulness but by His infinitely powerful interventions. The gratuity of His choices is revealed in this discreet preference accorded the sterile.⁵¹

God's ways are not man's. He said so and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Manoe, Elcana, Zechariah, Joseph, and their wives are proof to the fact. An unfitness for marriage was on these occasions, a qualification for service.

Just as fruitfulness⁵² in marriage was esteemed so virginity before marriage was expected; the virgin was more desirable, because considered to be more fruitful, than the

⁵¹ Léon-Dufour, Op. Cit., p. 557.

⁵² De Vault, Joseph J., "The Concept of Virginity in Judaism", in Marian Studies, Vol. 13, 1962, p. 37; McKenzie, J.L., Dictionary of the Bible, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1965, "Virginity", p. 913-914.

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one who had known man. He who seduced a virgin must marry her or pay her father damages in the full bridal price (Ex 22:15). The high priest must marry a virgin (Lv 21:13; 21:7); this was a concern for ritual purity in the sexual domain rather than an esteem for virginity in itself (Lv 21:15).

Great though the desire for children was it was only later Judaism that considered the unmarried state sinful. The early Hebrew could not conceive of one omitting his duty in this respect so few were the cases of neglect.⁵³ The duty was a duty to society. Thus Israel watched over marriage and procreation with just concern, for her children would be as the stars of the sky (Gn 15:5) only if born in a family of the people of God.

And just as the Levite practiced temporary continence for the sake of cultic purity, man and wife in their sexual relations had many a prohibition to make or to keep them

⁵³ According to a Pharisaic tradition, Miriam and Aaron had occasion to complain to God that Moses had had no intercourse with his wife (Nu 12:1-8). But, God justifies Moses: It was fitting that he who spoke face to face with Yahweh should practice prolonged continence. The Hebrew could understand this. See Delling, *Op. Cit.*, p. 833; Ford, *Op. Cit.*, p. 31-32; Brownlee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 80-81.

However, the cause of the complaint is not clearly spelled out in the text. The underlying reason seems to be the wounded pride of Miriam and Aaron. God defends the unique position of Moses against them. The above interpretation cannot be taken from a reading of the text alone.

clean. This demand for cultic continence arose not because of some stain which must be removed, but from the need to manifest one's dedication to the affairs of God. The Concept⁵⁴ of purification is closely related to that of sanctification or consecration. Purification removed an obstacle to the near approach to God; sanctification prepared one for, or resulted from, close contact with the holy. To come near to God, person or thing must first be withdrawn from the realm of the usual and ordinary. For example: The man who fought in a holy war become 'holy', and his consecration resulted in an interdict: He must not be profaned. Therefore, fighting men were bound to observe continence. Temporary continence, for the Jew, was more than a mere ritual observance, it was a positive act of cultic consecration.

Continence presupposes a high degree of purity for men to put aside even the lawful use of sex for good reason- in this case the Law. But, castration⁵⁵ was another matter, definitely contrary to the Divine Will. The Hebrews were the only people of antiquity to enact laws against emasculation as a disintegration⁵⁶ of the person incompatible with

54 de Vaux, Op. Cit., p. 264-265.

55 Werblowsky, Op. Cit., p. 81, "Castration".

56 Schneider, Op. Cit., p. 766.

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their high ideals. No eunuch⁵⁷ was to be received into the chosen people neither to marry a daughter of Israel nor even to enter the assembly of the Lord and, of course, he could not be a priest. (Lv 21:20; Dt 23:2). A natural state of potency was destroyed, health impaired, and procreation essential to the established cultic order as well as to the prosperity of the nation was curtailed. Continence was a real possibility to the Hebrew--mutilation was unnecessary. Thus it was the very purity of the Hebrew attitude in the whole realm of sex that opened the way to a mentality that could embrace first temporary continence--then more.

b) Sanctification--Unity of God with Men.— Deep spiritual significance⁵⁸ lay behind the whole system of purification because of Israel's call to be a holy people. The mechanical removal of technical 'impurity' was not the whole of it; 'purity' came to be the outward expression of moral perfection (Lv 17:6; Dt 21:6). The decisive element was that of belonging to God--not of separation: "In the morning will Yahweh make known who is his, and who (therefore) is holy" (Nb 16:5).

⁵⁷ McKenzie, Op. Cit., p. 252: In the Old Testament sarîs 'head' or 'chief' does not always mean eunuch. Also, Schneider, Op. Cit., p. 766.

⁵⁸ Eichrodt, Walter, Theology of the Old Testament, Vol. 1, translated by J.A. Baker, London, SCM, 1961, p. 136-137.

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The role⁵⁹ of the divine in the theme of promised progeny was evident in the lives of the great Patriarchs. There was prayer, but so was there polygamy--to help it out. It was an accepted fact that biological factors, though necessary, were not sufficient to result in conception and childbirth. Jacob reminds Rachel that her barrenness is not due to him but to God who withheld the fruit of her womb (Gn 30:2). Isaac prays to Yahweh on behalf of Rebekah and only then does she conceive (Gn 25:21). The overall concept of⁶⁰ sex received a new orientation from the teaching of the prophets. Marriage was a covenant (berith) like the covenant (berith) of God with His people (Ml 2:14). It should result in fidelity and loving kindness (hesed) between the two, just as it should between Yahweh and His people, bound as they were by ties of the heart and not just those of the law (Ho 2:21-22). A new emphasis was placed on mutual love and permanent consecration. Fecundity there was of course, but as the result and reward of love. The beauty

59 Gordon, Op. Cit., "The Patriarchal Age", p. 238-240. The theme is present in myth, for example: In the Epic of Aqhat when virtuous Danel prays to El, the biological requirements together with the divine blessing bring about conception. See also Gordon, Before the Bible, p. 156; Gaster, Op. Cit., p. 330.

60 James, Op. Cit., p. 128: That the fertility cults of the Nations did infiltrate Israel is to be seen in the figure of the marriage of Yahweh with His people; see Grelot, Op. Cit., p. 58-59.

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and fullness of the man-woman relationship is seen in a new light from its use as the symbol of the Divine relationship of Yahweh with Israel.

Israel⁶¹ is the one wife chosen by the one and only God. She is but a sometimes faithful bride, the virgin (Jr 31:21; 31:4) helpless before the lust of conquerors, the more pitiful because by wanton foolishness she left the safety of Yahweh's law. All sin is adultery, a turning away from God's love: "The whole country itself has become nothing but a whore by abandoning Yahweh (Ho 1:2)". Again and again there is a promise that the perseverance of divine love will, in the end, bring her back (Ho 2:21; 14:5). Symbolic language (Ho 3:1-5) conveys a depth of meaning--the freshness of love renewed like to virginity regained. Israel is at once virgin, bride, prostitute, and virgin again. There is no problem in such a concept for the Near Eastern mind. The New Jerusalem whose joy is that of a bride adorned whose glory is that of a bride once more a virgin who gives all for her husband's happiness (Is 62:4). From the prostitute that she was (Is 1:21) she has become both virgin and mother of many children:

This return to original innocence after God's triumph over sin is a miracle of grace and it is this which is at the heart of the prophetic promises.⁶²

61 de Vaux, *Op. Cit.*, p. 26.

62 Grelot, *Op. Cit.*, p. 67.

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A remarkable⁶³ spiritual growth has taken place. The ideal couple of Genesis and the near ideal patriarchal couples did not attain the level of Tobias and Sarah where duty and fidelity, fecundity and indissolubility are seen in the setting of the marriage between God and His people. The overall biblical image⁶⁴ of marriage presents the partnership of persons as a personal-sexual-spiritual companionship ordained by God.

Only one⁶⁵ was called to forego marriage in the Old Testament. Jeremiah was celibate, at least for the time, on the explicit orders of Yahweh (Jr 16:1-4). Just as other prophets⁶⁶ found in marriage a reenforcement of their prophetic message (Ho 1:2-9; Is 8:3; Ez 24:15-17) so Jeremiah used the loneliness and hopelessness of his unmarried state as a sign, an enacted prophecy.

The facts⁶⁷ are clear: Jeremiah is not a married man with a family, and he expects a horrible end for his

63 Grelot, Op. Cit., p. 74.

64 Buttrick, G.A., (Ed.), The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, New York, Abingdon Press, 1962, p. 286.

65 Legrand, Op. Cit., p. 26-36. Also Ford, Trilogy, p. 24, argues for the temporary celibacy of Jeremiah.

66 Jones, H. Gunliffe, The Book of Jeremiah, Introduction and Commentary, London, SCM, 1960, p. 128.

67 Blank, Sheldon H., Jeremiah Man and Prophet, Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Press, 1961, p. 75.

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people. The second is probably the motive of the first. Thus he⁶⁸ is unmarried by design, and since bachelorhood was practically unheard of, he must have felt the inclination or call from youth.

Celibacy was the will of God for Jeremiah, not for others; the day of the Lord was preached, not celibacy. His forlorn condition spoke to Virgin Israel: "When death already casts her shadow over the land is it time to marry?"⁶⁹. And, no doubt his own pain was the greater because he had no family for comfort: "Who will find me a wayfarer's shelter (Jr 9:1)?".

Beside the ideal of an ever more perfect married love, virginity is becoming discernible as a model of fidelity and response (and virginity lost that of idolatry--sin in general). The point is that virginity once lost could be regained by a return to the beloved, that is, by love. Of course, physical integrity is not the point, it is the heart single in aim, taken up with Yahweh and His law that defines 'virgin' in this context--and, perhaps, in religious thought for all time.

Then there is the double role at once virgin and

⁶⁸ Bright, John, The Anchor Bible, Jeremiah Introduction, Translation and Notes, New York, Doubleday, 1965, p. 112: "Despite the pedestrian style the material is unquestionably authentic."

⁶⁹ Legrand, Op. Cit., p. 29.

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mother; virginal fecundity is a possibility. Not only the prophets, but the ancient myths laid the foundations for the new concept. Israel's union with Yahweh is virginal--it is of the heart, yet it will be fruitful for the kingdom--the Messiah will come from Israel.

Present information indicates that men have always considered sex as holy--a mysterious power which was at once source of life and contact with the divine. Both the use and the non-use of sex, as complementary aspects of worship, seem to have developed early. Among the gods there was first virginity then love, marriage, fecundity, and virginity again in the annual cycle of renewal along with all nature. Among men the complementary and contradictory roles were lived out by priest and priestess as eunuch and virgin, and male and female prostitute. Power was generated and stored up for the community or lavishly poured forth to the benefit of men and nature alike. The one was as necessary as the other and in ritual, celebrated as exemplary, they served the whole people. Virginity retained whether freely or not, indicates that men considered an unlimited devotion in the service of the gods as fitting; the eunuch's state speaks of a lasting service--once a eunuch forever a eunuch.

The ancients could speak of both virginal freshness

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and virginal fecundity. In Hebrew and Aramaic, as well as in Greek, the words for 'virgin' refer to age--it was more a matter of youth and beauty than a question of sexual experience. There was no unambiguous word, and therefore no clear interest in virginity as a physical condition. In a religious context 'virginity' indicated a state of devotion.

According to the religion of Israel, sex is a created thing--ordained by God, for man's use, and hedged about by many a prescription of society. The clear doctrine of the purpose of the sexes and the monogamous couple, as revealed in Genesis, made the fertility cult superfluous. Integration of sexuality within the person made for wholeness and continence a real possibility. Integration of sexuality among men took sexual experience out of worship and enshrined it in the home where the Law determined its proper usage.

To approach the holy men must put aside ordinary and everyday concerns. Continence was the way in which men prepared for worship and, made sex holy. More than a preparation continence was, for the Hebrew, a positive act of cultic consecration.

CHAPTER II

PROXIMATE BACKGROUND TO THE NOTION OF CELIBACY

1. Proximate Background within Judaism.-

With the destruction¹ of Jerusalem and the exile in Babylon, Nation and cult vanished. The old order had been destroyed and could not be recreated by so simple a means as the rebuilding of city walls and temple. Israel must find a new definition of herself: "When the law had been forgotten in Israel, Ezra came up from Babylon and established it."²

During the centuries³ of Persian, Greek, and Roman domination the ancient religion took a new direction. It came to be called Judaism as distinguished from the religion of pre-exilic days. The Law now not only regulated the community, it created the community; the scribe soon came to be teacher and guardian of the law. In the Theocracy of Judaism the Jew was a "member of Israel who assumed the

¹ Bright, John, A History of Israel, London, SCM, 1960, p. 413-416.

² Moore, George Foot, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, The Age of the Tannaim, Vol. 1, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1950, p. 7.

³ De Vault, Joseph J., "The Concept of Virginity in Judaism", in Marian Studies, Vol. 13, 1962, p. 24; Bright, Op. Cit., p. 413; Moore, Op. Cit., p. 3, footnote 18.

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burden of the law",⁴ where loyalty⁵ to the community was the unifying force of the nation.

a) Judaism--Dedication to God through Law.--

Reverence for the Law⁶ came to characterize the age. Ritual purity was religion's primary norm. The religious observance of ordinary people rose even to the heroic as is proudly recounted in the Second Book of Maccabees. Doubtless there is considerable decoration as to detail, but the fact comes through clearly that some men and women, and even some children were ready for that total dedication to God--martyrdom. For example, there was the old man Eleazar (2 Mc 6:18-31), and the Mother with her seven Sons (2 Mc 7).

Among the holy activities⁷ of ancient Israel was war. All wars were holy wars for it was Yahweh who fought for the people, not they for Him. Because of this special relationship the warrior was in a state of ritual cleanliness, that is, he was 'made holy' (Jos 3:5; Jr 6:4,22; Jl 4:9). For a

4 De Vault, Op. Cit., p. 27.

5 Ringgren, Helmer and Åke V. Ström, Religions of Mankind Today and Yesterday, Edited by J.C.G. Greig, translated by Neils L. Jensen, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1967, p. xxxv.

6 Bright, Op. Cit., p. 415-416; De Vault, Op. Cit., p. 32.

7 de Vaux, Roland, Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions, translated by John McHugh, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961, p. 258-266.

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time⁸, regardless of his life before and after, he partook of the sacred. What is more the entire camp, as well as the person of the warrior, was a sacred sphere from which all that was unclean must be kept away (Dt 23:15); he must scrupulously abstain from sexual intercourse (1 S 21:6) during the whole time of his service, just as the priest must during his period of service. But gradually⁹, as with kingship, war lost its sacral character--the king was leader, the troops were paid--war became a profane thing.

From the time¹⁰ of the Judges the use of vow as a voluntary act of devotion involving the promise to God to perform some action, or to refrain from it, became widespread. Samson was the first great Nazirite and Warrior. On the initiative of God he was committed always to let his hair grow, by which symbolic act strength, from God, was both preserved and augmented. In more modern times one became a nazirite for a short time and for a definite purpose: an increase of strength of soul. Because of his vow a man was sacred unto Yahweh (Nb 6:2-8)--one with the ancient warrior, chieftain, prophet, and priest. It was a

⁸ Pedersen, Johs., Israel, Its Life and Culture, Vol. 3-4, London, University Press, 1940, p. 10-18.

⁹ de Vaux, Op. Cit., p. 258.

¹⁰ De Vault, Op. Cit., p. 33; Pedersen, Op. Cit., p. 265-6.

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holiness acquired for a time and then again put aside.

To make a vow¹¹--often involving such trivial matter as the cutting of hair, was an act of resistance against idol worship, sexual orgies, and preoccupation with personal appearance so characteristic of the Canaanites. In his own way, the nazirite did much to prevent the religion of Israel from drifting into compromise with that of Canaan.

During the reign¹² of David and Solomon the priestly line of Zadok (1 K 2:35) was established. Later, when the Zadokite priests seceded from Jerusalem and temple service (175-174 B.C.) they became, in practice, nazirite and warrior as well, and would have been under to the warriors' abstention from sexual intercourse. Holiness was a dedication--a fitness of body and heart for the Lord:

The spirit of virginity in the sense of a total dedication to God was present in Judaism, the Sitz im Leben of the beginnings of Christianity.¹³

But nevertheless, celibacy¹⁴ was never the subject

¹¹ Eichrodt, Walter, The Theology of the Old Testament, Vol. 1, translated by J.A. Baker, London, SCM, 1961, p. 305-306.

¹² Black, Matthew, The Scrolls and Christian Origins Studies in the Jewish Background of the New Testament, London, Nelson, 1961, p. 165 and 30.

¹³ De Vault, Op. Cit., p. 36.

¹⁴ Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi and G. Wigoder, The Encyclopedia of Jewish Religion, New York, Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1966, p. 82.

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of nazirite vow. Temporary continence could be promised for a period (Ned 5:6), at most two weeks. Rabbinic law required religious leaders to be married as a condition for public office. The Rabbi Azzi is the only recorded exception (Yev 63b). Love for the Torah is given as sufficient cause, in his case, though general embarrassment is evident in the Mishnah, since religious perfection was not conceivable outside of marriage (Yev 63a).

b) The Septuagint--The 'Parthenos' of Isaiah 7:14.--

Reverence for the Law inspired the collecting and preserving of the Holy Scriptures. Political upheavals caused the permanent dispersion of some Jews who took with them their Law. At Alexandria¹⁵ about 250 B.C. the Scriptures were translated into Greek. For a time, the Greek translation was resisted in Jerusalem, and only the Hebrew text was considered canonical. Nevertheless, the Septuagint's influence came to make itself felt as is evident from its use both by Paul and in the Mishnah.

¹⁵ Finkel, Asher, The Pharisees and the Teacher of Nazareth, A Study of their Background, their Halackic and Midrashic Teachings, the Similarities and Differences, Leiden, Brill, 1964, p. 22.

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If Isaiah 7:14 is read in the Hebrew¹⁶ 'almāh is found, if read in the Greek the much stronger, though still not absolute, parthenos is used instead. That 'almāh was translated as 'virgin' points to a bias on the part of the translators. Were they aware of the Ugaritic story, "Kerit", of the young woman who will bear a son, and of the parallel text of the bethūlāh, the virgin? If so, the rendering¹⁷ of 'virgin' in Isaiah rests on an old Jewish interpretation which in turn rests on a text that is not only pre-Isaiah but pre-Mosaic in the form in which we now have it on clay tablets.

The suggestion¹⁸ that Isaiah was aware of the use of 'almāh in the current literature supports the Septuagint's use of 'virgin'. He was then following a tradition that

16 Gordon, Cyrus H., "Almah in Isaiah 7:14", in Journal of Bible and Religion, Vol. 21, No. 2, April 1953, p. 106: Ever since publication of the RSV there has been a storm over the translation of 'almāh in Is. 7:14 as 'young woman' instead of the KJV 'virgin':

RSV: Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

KJV: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel.

JB: It is this: the maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Immanuel.

17 Mowinckel, S., He That Cometh, translated by G.W. Anderson, Oxford, Blackwell, 1956, p. 185 and 112-114.

18 Vawter, Bruce, "The Ugaritic Use of GLMT", in Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 4, Oct. 1952, p. 319-322, especially 321.

does not appear from the letter of the Hebrew text. The (more) unequivocal word, parthenos, was chosen because 'almāh did not convey the desired meaning. Not all exegetes¹⁹ accept the above interpretation. Some hold that Isaiah 7:14 derived not from a tradition of Canaanite culture as found on the Ras Shamra tablets but upon a popular interpretation which identified Immanuel's mother with Israel. Therefore, parthenos was the suitable word arising from the Hebrew bethūlāh as met in such expressions as Virgin Sion, Virgin Daughter Judah, Virgin Israel. The idea of a corporate, and therefore virginal, mother is found in Micah 4:10 and 5:2, and may have influenced the translation of the Septuagint. Considering the total Septuagint usage²⁰ it is even possible that the translators considered the virgin's child to have a non-sexual origin.

Whatever the reason, the Greek Old Testament went beyond the proper sense of 'almāh. In so doing the miraculous character of the birth of Immanuel as future king is emphasized. It is unlikely that Isaiah thought of the young woman as virgin:

19 Brownlee, William Hugh, The Meaning of the Qumrān Scrolls for the Bible with Special Attention to the Book of Isaiah, New York, Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 280.

20 Delling, A., "παρθένος", in JWNT, Vol. 5, 1967, p. 833.

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But later on, when the idea was read into his words, it was in accord with the original ideas about 'the young woman's son'.²¹

Here again²² the exact physical condition of 'virgin' is ambiguous--irrelevant even. It is the far-reaching purpose of the call of God that gives meaning not to the 'virginity' itself, for it has no religious significance, but to the fruit of virginity--complete dedication.

c) Mishnah and Law--Men, Marriage and Celibacy.-- It would seem that "Voluntary renunciation of marriage is a concept utterly foreign to Judaism".²³ The consuming desire for children evident from Sarah to Elizabeth, from Abraham to Zachariah was characteristic of the people of God.²⁴ The pious Jew would not, could not in fact, practice celibacy nor seek to retain virginity as a dedication to God. Law

21 Mowinckel, Op. Cit., p. 185.

22 Ford, J.M., "The Meaning of Virgin", in New Testament Studies, Vol. 12, No. 3, April 1966, p. 299: In the litanies and writings of the early church the mother of Jesus is often referred to as ever-virgin, 'αἰ παρθένας, rather than virgin, παρθένας. Apparently the latter did not make her state in life clear enough.

23 Landman, Issac, (Ed.), The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. 3, New York, Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Co., 1941, p. 72.

24 Gordon, C.H., Before the Bible. The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilization, London, Collins 1962, p. 156: Concern for a son was not all that universal. Every example in the Bible is before the monarchy. There is no reason to doubt that among the common people the desire still flourished.

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was the determining factor in his life and the first command basic (Gn 1:28).

The Law²⁵ was composed of the Written--the Five Books of Moses, and the Oral--the traditions of the elders. They were equally venerated: Both were legacies of the Sinai Covenant, and both were handed down (orally) for some centuries. From early times the Law was not rigid because, as the Oral developed in conjunction with what came to be the Written, it was interpreted--added to, modified, ignored --to meet the needs of changing conditions.

Inevitably the Oral Law came to supercede the Written as a daily concern in the lives of men:

Greater stringency applies to the observance of the words of the Scribes (namely, the authorized exponents of the Law) than to the observance of the (Written) Law (Sanh. 11:3; Hor. 1:3).

Gradually, too, as a people of the Law, they would debate certain precepts, form firm and eventually rigid traditions, and finally despite conviction to the contrary, commit the Oral law to writing. The result was the Mishnah:

A deposit of four centuries of Jewish religious and cultural activity in Palestine beginning at some uncertain date possibly during the earlier half of the second century B.C. and ending with the close of the second century A.D.²⁶

25 Danby, Herbert, The Mishnah, Translated from the Hebrew, Oxford University Press, 1933, p. xiii-xvii, especially footnote 3, p. xvii.

26 Danby, Op. Cit., p. xiii.

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The Mishnah²⁷, as a body of Pharisaic teaching, made no allowances for differing opinions held by Sadducees, Essenes, or other dissenters. It is to be expected that popular teaching would have much to say about marriage; what is surprising is the amount of debate about non-marriage thought to exist only in later times and perhaps in an isolated desert band.

Any man who has no wife is without joy, without blessing, and without goodness (Yeb 62b).

Any man who has no wife is no proper man; for it is said, Male and female created He them and called their name Adam (Yeb 63a).

He who does not engage in propagation of the race is as though he sheds blood, for it is said, Whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed, and this is immediately followed by the text, And, you, be ye fruitful and multiply (Yeb 63b).

Celibacy is further regarded as an unnatural state conducive to sinful thought. Men were advised to marry young the better to have peace, and to serve God without the necessity of heroic struggle to submerge natural impulses (Kid 29b).

Strangely enough, there is no word²⁸ for marriage

²⁷ Davies, W.D., Paul and Rabbinic Judaism, Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology, London, SPCK, 1948, p. 1-3: "It follows that we cannot, without extreme caution, use the Rabbinic sources as evidence for the first century Judaism" (p. 3).

²⁸ Van den Born, A., Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible, translated by Louis F. Hartman, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1963, "Marriage", Col. 1456.

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in the Old Testament. It was neither religious rite nor public act but merely a private affair between two families. She entered his house; they were married. But, whatever the designation, marriage was the normal way of life. Proof of the fact was that only the abnormal did not marry. Neither is there a word for bachelor²⁹, and though there are widows³⁰ there is no evidence of spinsters. It³¹ is only in later times that a widow is not praised for entering a second marriage. Regular use of marriage was not only encouraged but prescribed:

No man may abstain from keeping the law Be fruitful and multiply (Gn 1:28) unless he already has children: according to the School of Shammai, two sons; according to the School of Hillel, a son and a daughter, for it is written, Male and female created He them (Gn 5:4) (Yeb 5:6).

Aside from the question of procreation:

The Duty of marriage enjoined in the Law (Ex 21:10) is: everyday for them that are unoccupied; twice a week for laborers; once a week for ass-drivers; once every thirty days for camel-drivers; once every six months for sailors (Ket 5:6).

Though sexual union is natural, that is, of creation and

29 Douglas, J.D., (Ed.), The New Bible Dictionary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1962, p. 786.

30 Buttrick, G.A., (Ed.), The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, New York, Abingdon Press, 1962, Vol. 3, p. 281.

31 Van den Born, Op. Cit., Col. 1458.

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not holy, in the sense of being reserved to the divine, it is ordained by God. It is only in marriage³² that a man's need for physical and social companionship is sanctified, for marriage is the hallowing, kiddushin, of two human beings to life's holiest purposes.

d) Law and Mishnah--Women, Marriage and Celibacy.--

During the time³³ of the Second Commonwealth (152 B.C. to 70 A.D.) the attitude toward sex became progressively more self-conscious and always less expressive of that spontaneous joy with which man first greeted woman. While the ideal of love, marriage, and fecundity was more readily seen to be attainable, trust in women and confidence in the possibility of a chaste life seemed to be almost despaired of:

Women are overcome by the spirit of fornication more than men, and in their heart they plot against man (Qo 7:28).

The two attitudes do make a strange pair. They are indicative, at least, of an honest desire to line up ideals and conduct, to find first a unity within oneself and then within society.

So pessimistic a philosophy led to the dead end of

³² Epstein, Rabbi, Dr. I., (Ed.), The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nashim; Yebamoth 1, London, Soncino Press, 1936, p. xiii; Moore, Op. Cit., p. 122.

³³ Epstein, Louis M., Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism, New York, Ktov Publishing House, 1948, p. 8-15.

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mistrust of human nature in the form of a condemnation of women. This was found not only in the attitude of men but in the heart of women, as is evident in the old Jewish prayer:

"Blessed may you be, O God, for not having made me a gentile, nor a woman, nor an ignoramus." And the woman's answering prayer of resignation: "Praised be you, Lord, who created me according to your will."³⁴

In early Israel³⁵ women mingled freely with men-- they looked after sheep (Gn 29:6), drew water (Gn 24:13; 1 S 9:11), went gleaning (Rt 2:2), and could talk to men openly (Gn 24:15-21; 29:11-12). Not so in later days. But if, as post-exilic Judaism³⁶ claimed to look on a woman was sinful then of course seclusion, veiling, and chaperoning were necessary ... for the protection of men. These preventive measures came into such rigorous observance that for a woman to appear in public with head uncovered was cause for divorce equal to adultery. Paul³⁷ speaks emphatically against the unveiled women in his church

³⁴ Léon-Dufour, X., (Ed.), Dictionary of the Biblical Theology, translated under the direction of P. Joseph Cahill, London, Chapman, 1967, p. 584.

³⁵ de Vaux, Op. Cit., p. 30.

³⁶ Epstein, Op. Cit., p. 39-42, (Ket 72a; Yeb Sotah 16b). McKenzie, J.L., Dictionary of the Bible, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1965, "Veil", p. 912: The information here knows of no such tradition of veiling in Judaism.

³⁷ Epstein, Op. Cit., p. 40.

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(1 Co 11:5). He stresses its lack of fitness and the need for it as a symbol of submission to husbands. Though Paul did have many woman friends, dearly loved and trusted (Rm 16:1-16; Phm 1:2; 1 Co 16:19), still, he was a man of his day--women had their place, and they were to keep it.

A woman's life was clearly mapped out. Her place was in the home, first under the protection of her father then that of her husband. "The Jewish female was to come to the marriage bed a virgin; thereafter it was her duty and her glory to bear children."³⁸ In a sense, betrothal³⁹ resembled a religious act in which a woman was consecrated to her husband, set apart for him exclusively (Ex 20:17). Hebrew vocabulary underscores the fact: The word for husband is ba'al--owner, and for wife is b'e'ûah--the owned. But primordially, marriage was a social act, the concern of society at large. A new family was being founded on which the nation depended for its present stability and its future fulfillment as a people. The individual woman could not claim prior consideration.

³⁸ De Vault, Op. Cit., p. 37.

³⁹ de Vaux, Op. Cit., p. 548. The depressed state of women must not be exaggerated out of context. The Hebrew woman was no worse off than other women of her time; see Legrand, p. 19. But de Vaux considers the social and legal position of the Israelite woman inferior, see p. 40.

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The helplessness of women was augmented by rabbinic law. Barrenness⁴⁰ was grounds for divorce. If after ten years, a wife bore no child it was the duty of the husband to divorce her (Yeb 6:6; 64a). Furthermore, the Pharisees⁴¹ determined which blood of the menstruant was considered impure (Nid 2:6). Though the Sadducees scorned such fastidiousness, their wives had to obey so that their sons would not be 'children of impurity' (Kall 1).⁴² The reason behind the law (as explained in modern times) was not so much a concern for ritual purity as a measure to have men abstain for a time to safeguard marriage. Thus they would not so soon tire of their wives.

In the ancient world then, the only place for woman was in the home and the only way open to her--wife, mother, housekeeper. This very attitude on the part of society made of marriage not a vocation but a necessity. Generally,

40 Moore, Op. Cit., p. 125.

41 Finkel, Op. Cit., p. 50.

42 Van der Leeuw, G., Religion in Essence and Manifestation, Vol. 1, translated by J.E. Turner, New York, Harper and Row, 1963, p. 44: The common exclusion of women from pagan cult during menses was due to the belief that her power as woman, which was great anyway, was even greater at this time. The power that flowed out from her would antagonize the power in the cult. It is plausible that the same idea, in no way explicit, was behind the law not to approach a menstruating woman during the time of war. There was just too much power for the good of the man.

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for the woman death was preferable to a state of non-marriage no matter how unsuitable or enslaving the 'alliance' might be. Men needed it to keep from sin, and women needed it to keep a roof overhead. Both, of course, as well as Jewish society at large, desired children.

2. Proximate Background on the Fringes of Judaism.-

a) Outside Influences on Judaism.- From the pleas and threats of the early prophets to the defensive decrees of Ezra (Ne 13:23-27) through to the violent resistance of the Hasidim, Israel was called to resist outside influence. However, since Palestine was no island some cultural and religious influence was inevitable.

The historical narrative of⁴³ the Bible stops at the end of the fifth century B.C. During this time the Hebrew language was gradually lost as Aramaic, the official language of the Persian Empire, became widespread (Ne 13:24). Beyond vocabulary some religious influence is discernible. Gnosticism,⁴⁴ in the broad sense of salvation through esoteric knowledge infused through contemplation or sacral rite, is uncertain here. The Essenes do esteem knowledge--

43 Bright, Op. Cit., p. 395.

44 Burrows, Millar, The Dead Sea Scrolls, London, Secker and Warburg, 1956, p. 251-260. Real gnosticism as an heretical form of Christianity arose only in the second century A.D.

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but, knowledge of the 'law' is not a gnostic idea.

Scholars⁴⁵ have generally reduced the claim of a dependence on Zoroastrianism to that of a superficial resemblance, as for example, the seven archangels of Judaism. The dualistic tendency⁴⁶ (late 2c B.C.) evident in the sectarians both of Qumran and of Christianity, never reached the heart, for both are definitely Judaic in origin and firmly based on Old Testament theology.

The process⁴⁷ of Hellenization was already going on during the Persian period. With Alexander the Great (333 B.C.), and his appreciation for all things Greek, Greek civilization spread rapidly. Under the Seleucids it cut deeply into Judaism. The pressure⁴⁸ to conform reached its height by the first half of the second century B.C. with its adoption by the sacerdotal aristocracy. In Jerusalem a gymnasium was built for educational as well as athletic purposes (1 Mc 1:11-15; 2 Mc 4:9-16), and with Greek learning and costume became the fashion. Zeal for the

⁴⁵ McKenzie, Op. Cit., p. 661-663.

⁴⁶ Burrows, Op. Cit., p. 260.

⁴⁷ Bright, Op. Cit., p. 395-400; McKenzie, Op. Cit., p. 351.

⁴⁸ Noth, Martin, The History of Israel, (Second Ed.), London, Black, 1960 (1958), p. 359-373; Bright, Op. Cit., p. 401-406.

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preservation of Judaism, religion and way of life, crystallized. The Wars of the Maccabees were the result and Judaism was preserved.

Nevertheless, Hellenistic influence was there to stay. The educated⁴⁹ among the people were bilingual, speaking Aramaic and Greek. There were even Hellenistic synagogues in Jerusalem (Acts 6:9), and the Septuagint was preferred to the Hebrew scriptures. Two points are then to be noted: Judaism was open to Hellenistic influences even in Jerusalem, and Judaism before 70 A.D. was not as closed and cautious as it was later to become.

From the beginning⁵⁰ Israel's faith was eschatological in that it looked forward to Yahweh's purposes. Pre-exilic hope rested in the future of the nation, post-exilic in the present in which a radical change would call forth a new and different future. This, the Day of Yahweh, might come as a natural restoration, a purifying judgement, a rejuvenation of creation, or an outpouring of charismatic gifts. Jewish eschatology⁵¹ was nourished by an apocalyptic literature which developed among the pious of the Maccabean

⁴⁹ Davis, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism, p. 4-6, refers to J. Bonsirven, Le Judaïsme Palestinien, Vol. 1, p. 36-7.

⁵⁰ Bright, Op. Cit., p. 438-444.

⁵¹ Ringgren and Ström, Op. Cit., p. 131.

Age.

Apocalyptic is a literary form in which the prophet replaces the seer (Is 13; Ez 38-39; Zp 1:14-18) and the final days are foretold. Lavish imagery⁵² is borrowed from the mythologies of the neighbors. Of Iranian origin, its influence goes deeper than symbolism to concepts--good and evil; angels and devils. Some examples are the Book of Daniel, the non-canonical Enoch, and some of the Qumran writings. Apocalyptic was widely written and widely read, and its influence on men of the day was profound. Its popularity was due to an almost evangelical piety which allowed a large place to personal religion and personal union with God.

Apocalyptic splendidly illustrates Israel's ability to borrow and adapt, yet to make what she borrowed her own.⁵³

By the time of Christ⁵⁴ a number of Jewish sects existed in sharp antagonism. The Sadducees, conservative and positively disposed to Hellenism, gradually lost place among the people; Pharisaic Judaism reached its peak, and was formalized in the Mishnah; the Essenes lived and wrote, and

⁵² Black, Op. Cit., p. 169-170.

⁵³ Bright, Op. Cit., p. 144.

⁵⁴ Ringgren and Ström, Op. Cit., p. 129-130.

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apparently influenced men of several generations deeply enough to gain recruits; and the Christian Church with its Good News and missionary activity came into being.

b) The Sectarians--Marriage, Continence, and Celibacy.— When it is said that "Voluntary renunciation of marriage is a conception utterly foreign to Judaism"⁵⁵ it must be understood that Judaism here is equated with Pharisaism as defined by the Mishnah. Such a qualification⁵⁶ is necessary. There can be no doubt that the notion of celibacy, and even some limited practice of it, existed in Judaic times before and contemporary with Jesus, the New Testament authors, and the developing Mishnaic Tradition.

During the Hasmonaean period⁵⁷ the pious teachers or Hasidim split over questions of ritual purity into the Pharisees and the sectarians known as the Essenes. The sectarians did not just suddenly appear, unique in their religion. Their way⁵⁸ of life has similarities with the

⁵⁵ Landman, Op. Cit., p. 72.

⁵⁶ Sutcliffe, E., The Monks of Qumran as Depicted in the Dead Sea Scrolls, London, Burns and Oates, 1960, p. 97-100.

⁵⁷ Milik, J.T., Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea, translated by J. Strugnell, London, SCM, 1959: The Hasidim are probably the Asidians of 1 Mc 2:42: "The Congregation of the Asidians joined them (i.e. Mattathias Maccabaeus and his friends). These were men of valour from Israel, every man a volunteer for the law", p. 59.

⁵⁸ Black, Op. Cit., p. 14-16 and 164.

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ancient tribal ascetics, the Rechabites or Kenites (Jr 35: 1-11)--religious traditionalists who lived, by choice and by way of protest, in the desert; the Hasidaeans, warrior-saints so utterly devoted to the Law they would die rather than defile the Sabbath; the Zadokites, priests turned warriors who in their fervor became permanent nazirites (1 Mc 3:49). The Essenes as distinguished from the Pharisees developed this side of the Hasidaean movement--the priestly-warrior-saints of the Law.

The historians,⁵⁹ Flavius Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, and Pliny the Elder record the existence of this singular sect. According to Josephus,⁶⁰ the Essenes were celibate though he grants a second order which considered it a duty to continue the nation and mankind.

Philo sums up the motives for non-marriage: First, marriage was a danger to the community life; and second, the desire to remain continent--because women are selfish. He reports that the Essenes were full-grown men, verging on

⁵⁹ For literature relevant to the problem of celibacy see Josephus: Jewish Antiquities, XVIII, I, 5; Jewish Wars, II, VIII, 2, 13; Philo: Apology for the Jews, from Eusebius, Praeparatio Evangelis, VIII, II, 3 and 14; Pliny: Natural History, V. XV, 73.

⁶⁰ Cross, Frank Moore Jr., The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies, New York, Doubleday, 1958, p. 71: "Probably it was the other way around, all the sects were married except for one, the central community at Qumran, which remained celibate."

old age; there were no youths among them. An interesting conjecture⁶¹ follows on this: It is possible that the Essenes married young, had children, then left their families in order to live thereafter in complete continence.

The sectarians consisted of several branches: The therapeutae⁶² were 'contemplatives' as distinct from the 'practical' Essenes of Palestine. The women were 'aged virgins' who freely embraced a life of rigid asceticism in the pursuit of wisdom. Taking⁶³ into account the ambiguous meaning of the word virgin and the allegorical use of it by Philo, it is a reasonable assumption that they had married, raised families, then left husband or wife, and children. Though this would explain 'they spurned the body', it leaves open to question the statement 'they desire no offspring'.

The Qumran Scrolls⁶⁴ begin to date from the period of the Hasidim. Our understanding of this branch of the sect is based on their literature and the archaeological finds in the desert. Despite differences⁶⁵, Qumran seems

⁶¹ Ford, J. Massingberd, A Trilogy on Wisdom and Celibacy, Notre Dame, Un. of Notre Dame Press, 1967, p. 34.

⁶² Black, Op. Cit., p. 25; Philo, Contemplative Life, p. 68.

⁶³ Ford, Trilogy on Wisdom and Celibacy, p. 34-36.

⁶⁴ Black, Op. Cit., p. 17.

⁶⁵ Leaney, A.R.C., The Rule of Qumran and Its Meaning, Introduction, translation and commentary, London, SCM, 1966, p. 32 and 37.

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to be identical with, or part of, the movement reported by Josephus as the Essenes:

The discrepancies between the accounts of the Essenes in the sources and the sectarian literature of Qumran are explained by the exterior view and the Hellenizing tendency of the classical writers.⁶⁶

According to archaeologists⁶⁷ Qumran was occupied about 190 years covering six to eight generations, with an average population of 150 to 200. The total of the Essene sect at any one time was 3,000 (so Philo and Josephus) which would yield some five percent leading the strict life at Qumran. Nevertheless⁶⁸, particularly in what touches celibacy, the Essenes and Qumran must not be too closely approximated. It seems that the Essenes were philosophers, more Hellenistic than Palestinian, cheerful and peaceful, not notably sacerdotal, with little eschatological orientation and expectation of the Messiah. Qumran, on the contrary, was not interested in philosophy, was martial and fervent in liturgy, in setting up the Mosaic camp, in expectation of the Messiah, and all this in a deeply eschatological

66 Cross, Op. Cit., p. 52, note also p. 37.

67 Milik, Op. Cit., p. 98.

68 Ford, Trilogy on Wisdom and Celibacy, p. 54-55.

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framework. The above⁶⁹ may be only a matter of emphasis--one more, the other less eschatological, philosophical, or whatever.

Moreover, what may seem⁷⁰ like confusion in the texts is probably due to different dates of composition corresponding to stages of development within the sect, and also that the texts are directed to different branches. The hierarchical structure⁷¹ of Qumran allowed for such branches or orders within itself. There were the 'men of the Covenant' and the 'council of the Community':

Most of the sectarians--the 'men of the Covenant'--married, but the few who devoted themselves to the search for higher happiness and ritual purity found Celibacy more appropriate to their ends.⁷²

69 Cross, Op. Cit., p. 68-71, explains away the apparent differences and is able to conclude that generally "our classical sources complement and correspond to sources from the Qumran caves", p. 69.

70 Ford, Trilogy on Wisdom and Celibacy, p. 36.

71 Vermes, G., The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, Baltimore, Penguin, 1962, p. 29-33.

72 Vermes, Op. Cit., p. 31; Sutcliffe, Op. Cit., p. 258, footnote No. 12: The word translated 'community' common in the Manual does not occur in the Damascus Document. Whereas 'congregation' used frequently in the Damascus Document occurs only twice in the Manual. In the Two Columns 'congregation' appears 19 times and 'community' not at all. (Sutcliffe quotes Barthelemy, Qumran Cave 1, p.108): "This difference of usage confirms the observation that the documents envisage different groups". See also Cross, Op. Cit., p. 57.

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Certain passages⁷³ in the Rule of the Congregation and the Damascus Document indicate that marriage was the normal state. There are regulations concerning the formation of children and the age for marriage (1 QSa 1:6-11). It is possible that the Damascus Document has in view both the married and the celibate, both those living in settlements and those in the central community at Qumran:

if they live in camps...according to the custom of the earth and take wives and beget children (CD 7:6).

The Manual of Discipline⁷⁴ says nothing of a life of celibacy; it does, however, speak of the 'fruitfulness of offspring' as one of the blessings of those who walk in truth (1 QS 4:6-8); the statutes of the Covenant were to be read to the women and children; collections were to be made for the poor--widows and orphans (CD 14:12). These are the only references to women, except for a denunciation of whoredom (1 QS 1:6). The regulations contain no prescriptions regarding the ritual purity of married persons. Such an omission needs explanation, for this was a community of superfervent followers of the law. Whatever meaning⁷⁵

⁷³ Isaksson, Abel, Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple, A Study with Special Reference to Mt. 19:13-12, (sic) and 1 Cor. 11:3-16, Copenhagen, Lund, 1965, translated by Neil Tomkinson assisted by Jean Cray, p. 47.

⁷⁴ Ford, Trilogy on Wisdom and Celibacy, p. 36.

⁷⁵ Burrows, Op. Cit., p. 244.

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is derived from these few references, women played, at most, a very small part in the life of the community.

The practice of celibacy⁷⁶ or of protracted continence for one branch is further indicated by the difference in admission regulations:

1. For the settlements: a desire to return to a wholehearted observance of the Law of Moses and a willingness to follow the customs of the group permitted one immediately to take the oath of Covenant (CD 15:7-9).
2. For Qumran: a postulancy and a two-year novitiate prepared and tested the candidate for an exacting life (1 QS 6:13-23).

The document most pertinent to the continence-celibacy question is the War Scroll:

No young boy and no woman shall enter their encampments when they go forth from Jerusalem to go to battle, until their return...Any man who is not pure with regard to his sexual organs on the day of battle shall not join them in battle...(1 QM 7:3-7).

The War Scroll⁷⁷ contains detailed directions for the management of this war. The minimum age for admission to the sect is twenty, yet those twenty to twenty-five have no part assigned to them (note Nb 1:22). This fact, plus the exclusion from the camp of young boys and women, and that

⁷⁶ Sutcliffe, Op. Cit., p. 99.

⁷⁷ Isaksson, Op. Cit. ; this section is freely taken from pages 49-55.

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the age for marriage was set at twenty⁷⁸, may together offer an explanation.

The division into age groups is based on: first, the rules of service for Levites (Nb 8:23-26); second, the exclusion of those not fit for the holy war (2 S 11:7-13); third, the purity prescriptions for service in the temple (Lv 21:17-21; Lv 15:16-18). But, there is no precedent here for the exclusion of young men under twenty-five.

Though the War Scroll quotes Dt 20:2-4 for those exempt from battle, no mention is made of the newly married, and those building a house or planting a vineyard. Such regulations would hardly be necessary where property is held in common and men have no wives. Perhaps the reason no role in the war is allotted to the 'young men' is that there are none in the camp. At twenty they marry, have a family till twenty-five when they leave wife and children for good⁷⁹ in order to join the community.

⁷⁸ Black, Op. Cit., p. 28: The postponement of marriage till the age of twenty is unheard of in rabbinic Judaism.

⁷⁹ But, nowhere, have I been able to find evidence for Old Testament approval of the abandonment of wife and children, for whatever motive. One was to cling to his wife (Gn 2:24); "For I hate divorce, says Yahweh" (Ml 2:16); according to Rabbinic Law, the obligations of a father to his son cover all the years of his youth: to circumcise, redeem, teach the Torah, teach a trade, get a wife, and to teach him to swim (Jos Kid 1; Jer Kid 61a).

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The members over twenty-five were obliged to have no sexual cohabitation whatsoever.⁸⁰

Though it looked, to the historians, as if all Essenes lived in celibacy, in fact, they were celibate only after the age twenty-five.

The reason⁸¹ for the Qumran (that is, Essene) attitude to marriage is not that of the historians but of the Old Testament laws regarding ritual purity and the holy war. Nevertheless, the attitude goes far beyond that of the Pentateuch and is basically very different from rabbinical literature. The Qumran people were actually engaged in a war--the final war. They were not ascetics but soldiers:

Qumran's moral principles on the subject of marriage are indissolubly linked with its eschatology.⁸²

Deeply influenced⁸³ by the Sinai Tradition they determined to prepare for encounter with God and His messiahs. To be ready for encounter at any moment meant to stand, in spirit, at the foot of Sinai. Moses told the people to wash their garments (Ex 19:11) and to refrain from sexual intercourse (Ex 19:15) in preparation for the

80 Isaksson, Op. Cit., p. 55.

81 Isaksson, Op. Cit., p. 263 and 65.

82 Isaksson, Op. Cit., p. 65.

83 Betz, Otto, "The Eschatological Interpretation of the Sinai-Tradition in Qumran and in the New Testament", in Revue de Qumran, Vol. 6, No. 21, Feb. 1967, p. 93-94.

third day, the day of Yahweh. Since that day was unknown the aim was to be ever ready. By a life in the desert, dwelling in a camp, and by a 'state' of ritual purity they waited on the Lord, themselves the "kingdom of priests", the "holy nation" (Ex 19:6). Therefore their rules enjoined sexual abstinence, daily ablutions, white linen clothing, and sacred meals, for lay members as well as for priests. And, the accent was on permanence, to be always in a state of eschatological readiness.

Though a priestly people they were, as descendants of the Hasidim, warriors as well. The Wars⁸⁴ of the Maccabees were religious wars not holy wars. Though they fought for Israel (1 M 3:46), met at Mizpah, fasted, sought to know the will of God by opening the Book of the Law, sounded a trumpet and battle cry, it was undertaken and won by human means. Political interests had a large place. But for Qumran, God was 'The Hero of the Fight', and they awaited 'God's moment'. The final holy war was imminent and the destruction of the forces of darkness and evil would at last be complete. Qumran was not only eschatological but apocalyptic:

Against the background of this dualist thought the old notion of the holy war takes on a particularly violent character, expands to cosmic dimensions,

84 de Vaux, Op. Cit., p. 258-267.

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and yet is referred to the end of the present era of time: It is an apocalyptic war.⁸⁵

Originally, the Hasidim⁸⁶ were all nazirites. The asceticism of the Essenes was a development of this ideal. The nazirite's dedication⁸⁷ was essentially a vow of uncompromising allegiance, placing him in the service of God: "he is pledged to Yahweh" (Nb 6:2). As an ascetic practice⁸⁸ it was based on the priestly rules of abstinence and was substituted for the life-long consecration and dedication to the holy war (Nb 6:8; Lv 10:8; 21:11).

The total attitude⁸⁹ of Qumran toward marriage is ambiguous--there are indications of marriage, and indications that the Qumran community, the yahad, was largely celibate (CD 4:21-5; 11:7). An open attitude to marriage seems part of the Qumran faith. On the one hand, there were the priestly distinctions between purity and pollution, holiness and sin, which regulated one's approach to the holy, for example: one became holy by participation in a

85 de Vaux, Op. Cit., p. 267.

86 Black, Op. Cit., p. 17 and 30.

87 Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol. 1, The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions, translated by D.M.G. Stalker, New York, Harper and Row, 1962 (1957), p. 61-63.

88 Eichrodt, Op. Cit., p. 304.

89 Cross, Op. Cit., p. 72-73.

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holy war--therefore, sex life was suspended. On the other hand, there was the apocalyptic movement with a certain dualism which saw history as culminating in war and in the final victory of God--this was then a time of abnormal discipline of the flesh.

The two streams⁹⁰ came together in a priestly apocalyptic in which the dualism of both traditions unite. The rules of the holy war are a daily concern in Qumran as are the purity prescriptions of a priestly people before their God. The situation counsels against marriage, at least for some. As the Essene prepares for battle, to join the holy army, he "anticipates the coming condition in God's inbreaking kingdom".⁹¹

As dedication to God through Law came to the fore in Judaism, old ways and new were sought to express that devotion. The Wars of the Maccabees saw a revival of the ancient concept of the holy war, the Hasidim movement emphasized both nazirite devotion and priestly purity, so that holiness could be defined as dedication to, or fitness

⁹⁰ Leaney, Op. Cit., p. 113: Perhaps it was a 'hybrid type of life' where celibate and married sections of the Essene order lived in the same place. But it is more likely, according to Burrows, Op. Cit., p. 233, that the sect included both communities of celibate and settlements of families.

⁹¹ Cross, Op. Cit., p. 73.

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for, the service of the Lord. Outside influences, whether recognized or not, were present: apocalyptic literature and apocalyptic sects developed, and gnostic elements worked their way into theology and worship. Nevertheless, the real growth was truly Judaic--the concept of holiness as an expression of devotion through Law, both within and without the stern limits of orthodox Judaism. In all this, temporary continence was only a means to an end, accepted as part of life, and as such quietly taken for granted.

Again, the concept of 'virgin' was found to be ambiguous, referring more to complete dedication than to a physical condition. The Hebrew's high regard for marriage and family life left no room for the notion of 'virginity retained' as an act of devotion. Furthermore, celibacy was considered unnatural, even immoral.

The Qumran attitude toward marriage cannot be understood except in the context of their total eschatological outlook and way of life. Continence was highly esteemed, but only as one means among many to achieve their aim--to be ready always for the Day of Yahweh. It was almost inevitable that the warrior-priests of the Law should come to accept the notion of celibacy as the way of life most suitable for them. That they were married 'for a time', in order to fulfil the ancient Law, seems a reasonable hypothesis except for the subsequent abandonment of wives and

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children for which there is no Old Testament precedent. Though the practice of celibacy was probably not at all widespread it would have been accepted as a permanent state, and must have become well known throughout Palestine during the 200-year history of the Qumran community.

CHAPTER III

EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 19:10-12

The word of Jesus as revealed in Mt 19:12 must be understood against a wide background: the surrounding peoples, particularly the Canaanites, with their ritual-myths of fecundity, Judaism with its pure yet stern attitude toward sex--love, marriage and fecundity, and the Jewish Sectarians of Qumran with their practice of prolonged continence. Jesus came, and through His person and word spoke His own message of "eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom".

1. Introduction with Special Reference to Mt 19:10-12.-

Matthew is the First Gospel¹ not in date of publication but in its early recognition and wide influence within the Church. A mid-second century tradition cites the Apostle Matthew as the author. However, the text as we have it is not an original composition of one man, but a compilation from various sources of the message of salvation in the person and works of Jesus Christ. The editor-author²

1 Tasker, R.V.G., The Gospel According to St. Matthew An Introduction and Commentary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1961, p. 11-13.

2 Argyle, A.W., The Gospel According to Matthew, Cambridge Bible Commentary, Cambridge, Un.Press, 1963, p.13.

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was a Christian Jew writing for the Christian Jews of Palestine or, perhaps, of Syrian Antioch. He was well educated³, had sound Greek with a considerable vocabulary at his command, and a feeling for the 'Semitic atmosphere' true to the life situation of Jesus. The date⁴ of the completed work remains uncertain; it probably took final form after Mark (about 65 A.D.), not before 70, and very likely between 80-85.

During the intertestamental period⁵ Palestine was more bilingual, Aramaic and Greek, than is usually granted. As the oral tradition developed, even during the time of Our Lord, it is possible that a Jewish-Greek tradition grew up almost simultaneously with the Aramaic. It is also possible⁶ that Matthew was originally written, at least in part, in the 'Hebrew tongue', that is, in Aramaic, and later

3 Moule, C.F.D., The Birth of the New Testament, London, Black, 1962, p. 218-219, lists in "the wide and rather remarkable vocabulary" of Matthew verbs in - $\lambda\omega$, such as $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\epsilon\lambda\omega$.

4 Feine, Paul, Johannes Behm and Werner Georg Kümmel (Ed.), Introduction to the New Testament, translated by A.J. Mattill Jr., Nashville, New York, Abingdon, 1966, p. 84; Argyle, Op. Cit., p. 13-14.

5 Filson, Floyd V., A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, London, Adam and Black, 1960, p. 5-6.

6 The Jerusalem Bible, "Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels", New York, Darton, Longman and Todd edition, 1966, p. 2 and 12.

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thoroughly reworked in Greek. As we have it now the gospel⁷ is dependent on Mark, with some ninety percent of the material in common. The existence of another source, for convenience labelled "Q", shared by Luke and Matthew, is widely accepted by scholars. This leaves the origin of the 221 verses which appear in Matthew alone (including Mt 19:10-12) unaccounted for. A third source or sources sometimes called "M", an early Aramaic account of the sayings and actions of Jesus behind the canonical Matthew, is considered a likely explanation.

It is evident⁸ that Matthew was written from a careful plan. Thematic in form, scattered sayings are brought together in blocks of related material. Each⁹ has a narrative section (for example: Mt 19:3-15), discourses, and conclusion in orderly arrangement set out to meet the needs of the teaching Church. The sayings of Jesus are cryptic and concise, revealing the real genius of the author (note Mt 19:10-12). Matthew does not attempt, any more than

7 Tasker, Op. Cit., p. 11-14; Argyle, Op. Cit., p. 12 and 2.

8 Filson, Op. Cit., p. 3-4; Tasker, Op. Cit., p. 19; Stendahl, Krister, The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament, Uppsala, Gleerup-Lund, 1954, p. 23-25, discusses the purpose of Matthew as a teaching guide for Church leaders.

9 Stendahl, Op. Cit., p. 23, "According to von Dobschutz and Bultmann, Matthew intended to offer his Church a manual of discipline and a catechism of Christian behavior."

the other evangelists, to reproduce the exact words of Jesus. But, more than they¹⁰, he regards them as the New Torah.

Semitic style¹¹ is apparent in the inclusions, that is, the same phrase used at the beginning and end of a passage (perhaps, 19:11 and 19:12d), and by the repetition of a formula, for example: "there are eunuchs ..., there are eunuchs ..., and there are eunuchs". The theme of fulfillment is kept before the reader by frequent references to the Scriptures. Of the forty-one citations from the Old Testament, the twenty-one common to Mark, Matthew, and Luke are rendered according to the Septuagint, usually with common variations, showing a literary interdependence; but, of the twenty found in Matthew alone all are close to the Hebrew with some Septuagintal influence. The last does not suggest an Aramaic original behind Matthew so much as a use of Scripture peculiar to this gospel. It was, perhaps, an accepted manner of using Old Testament citations in the time of Our Lord.

a) Sources of Mt 19:3-15. Especially Mt 19:12.- Set

¹⁰ Davies, W.D., "Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come", Journal of Biblical Literature, Monograph Series, Vol. 7, 1952, p. 92.

¹¹ Léon-Dufour, Xavier, The Gospels and the Jesus of History, translated and edited by John McHugh, New York, Desclee, 1968 (1963), p. 113; also Stendahl, Op. Cit., p.193.

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up in parallel¹² with Mk 10:2-12 Mt 19:3-9 appears, in some respects, the more original: 1) Matthew flows more naturally, and is more vividly told; 2) The words "for every cause" point to the current debate between the schools of Hillel and Shammai; 3) The scriptural reference from Genesis made by Jesus and the counter reference by the Pharisees seem more original, that is, more likely, than both from Jesus as in Mark. Nevertheless most scholars¹³ place Matthew in dependence on Mark here. Then Matthew as secondary, presents an improved, re-Judaized account with v. 12 from Q and vv. 10-11 an editorial transition. On the other hand¹⁴, it is suggested that Matthew had another source, other than Mark and Q --some older marriage catechism of the early church treating of divorce (vv. 3-9), eunuchs (v. 12), and children (vv. 13-15). Perhaps, this early marriage catechism overlaps with the early Aramaic source, M.

There is internal evidence for accepting the logion

¹² Streeter, Burnett Hillman, The Four Gospels, A Study of Origins, Treating of the Manuscript Tradition, Sources, Authorship, and Dates, London, Macmillan, 1927, p. 259.

¹³ Isaksson, Abel, Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple, A Study with Special Reference to Mt. 19:3-13 and 1 Cor. 11:13-16, translated by Neil Tomkinson assisted by Jean Cray, Copenhagen, Lund, 1965, p. 93.

¹⁴ Isaksson, Op. Cit., p. 145.

19:10-12 as authentic: Jesus¹⁵ in colloquy with the disciples on Jewish soil, the paradoxical¹⁶ suggests a Semitic origin, and the rhythmic balance an oral background. Also, "eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom" is so un-Jewish a phrase as to prohibit ascribing it to the early Church, particularly the Church in Palestine. If the passage¹⁷ is so utterly Gentile that its source can be neither Q nor M then the pericope, claimed by neither Jew nor Greek, must be original to Jesus.

b) Redaction in Mt 19:3-15.— The gospel as we have it was compiled by a skilful and gifted editor, whose immediate knowledge of things Jewish cannot be doubted. Though, in essence, our logion derives from Jesus, evidence of redaction is as clear in which Matthew arranged the sayings of Jesus according to theme. It is logical then that statements on sex--marriage, divorce, non-marriage, and children should be grouped to form a single narrative.

The question arises: Are they to be read in

15 Lagrange, M.-J., Évangile selon Saint Matthieu, Septième Edition, Paris, Gabalda, 1948, p. 366; "Mt. est d'accord avec Mc. sur le fait d'un aparté, mais il l'a exposé en détail et dans des termes assurément authentiques, garantis, peut-on dire, par leur aspect paradoxal", p. 370.

16 Legrand, Lucien, The Biblical Doctrine of Virginity, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1963, p. 39.

17 Johnson, Sherman E., "Mt. 19:10-12", The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 7, 1951, p. 481.

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sequence, as given; does each have something to add to the truth of the other, so that if one is left out the others are found incomplete? Jesus taught many a lesson--He preached, argued, scolded, even condemned; the editor, from a collection of the words of Jesus chose, arranged, condensed, and even amplified. The logia¹⁸ Mt 19:3-9; 10-12; and 13-15 were probably said at different times and even to different people. That they now form one narrative is clear from the coherence and unity of the whole. All three¹⁹ deal with disenfranchized persons--married women, unmarried people, little children. All deal with marriage--the first through a discussion of divorce, the second as a declaration concerning those who are not married, and the third through a demonstration of the love due to children, heaven's blessing on marriage.

Modern day respect²⁰ for redaction and for the intelligence of the redactor, in this case called Matthew, suggests that the flow of thought be respected, and the whole be read in sequence as the editor surely intended.

¹⁸ Isaksson, Op. Cit., p. 145; Maly, Eugene H., "Virginity in the New Testament", Marian Studies, Vol. 13, 1962, p. 48.

¹⁹ Findlay, Alexander J., Jesus in the First Gospel, London, Hodder and Stoughton, (no date), p. 187.

²⁰ Quesnell, Quentin, "Made Themselves Eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven", Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 30, 1968, p. 338-340.

Thus, it is no longer possible to read v. 9 as the end of one section, verses 10-11 as interpolation and redaction introducing v. 12, or to delete and rearrange verses. The possible effect of so doing may be studied, of course, but one must always come back to the whole.

That redaction involves interpretation is evident in the editorial prerogatives of selection, arrangement, and emphasis:

Matthew's interpretation is rather seen as precisely the message of the gospel of Matthew, and modern hermeneutical discussion points to it consequently as the only available medium in which today's reader can receive the word of God.²¹

After all has been said, the text as we have it is the fact we begin with and the fact to which we return after the work is done.

c) Influences on Matthew with Reference to 19:10-12.

Jesus and His followers, including the editor of Matthew, were men of Judaism and men of their day. They were imbued with their sacred history and well aware of contemporary trends in the Pharisaic schools of thought. Christian originality must be seen against this background.

Rabbinic law debarred the unmarried from public

²¹ Quesnell, Op. Cit., p. 339-340.

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office²² (Yeb 63b); religious perfection was possible only in the married state (Yeb 63b). "Thus to be unmarried for any cause rendered one unfit for the highest spiritual functions."²³ And, as has been said so often, to be childless was a "reproach in Israel". Though there was some reaction against so obvious an injustice (Is 56:4-5; Ws 3:13-14), the general attitude changed little. That Jesus spoke as He did in the face of what must have amounted to disgust, if not hostility, underlines the importance He attached to His message at this point: "There is nothing in Jewish literature to parallel Matt. XIX. 12 in phraseology or motive".²⁴

Nevertheless, there was a certain kinship with sectarians on the fringe of Judaism. The exegesis²⁵ of the Old Testament by Jesus is similar to that found in the Habakkuk Commentary. It is suggested that there was a

22 Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi and G. Wigoder, The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966, p. 81-82.

23 Findlay, Op. Cit., p. 191.

24 Singe, I., (Ed.), The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. 3 New York, Funk and Wagnall's, 1902, p. 636, quotes Dalman, Worte Jesu, p. 100; see also Gustaf Dalman, The Words of Jesus, Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language, authorized English version by D.M. Kay, Edinburgh, Clark, 1902, p. 122-123.

25 Davies, W.D., Christian Origins and Judaism, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1962, p. 104 and 107-108; Stendahl, Op. Cit., p. 143-156 and 193.

school of exegesis behind Matthew, and perhaps such a school existed at Qumran. A study of the Qumran writings reveals that the New Testament is more Semitic than often supposed--but a partially Hellenized and Persianized Semitism. A deeper understanding of Matthew is one of the fruits of such a study. It is possible²⁶ that many of the teachings of Jesus were addressed to Essenes, or to those acquainted with their doctrine and way of life.

If Mt 19:10-12²⁷ has for its motive asceticism of a sexual nature, it is more likely an influence from the sectarians than from Hellenism. However, in Qumran, asceticism was only a means. As we have seen, the sect's views²⁸ on Marriage grew out of an eschatological attitude, and only in a minor way do they form an ethical system. This is evident from the scant legislation regarding ritual purity in sexual matters.

Influence from within the Church must not be

26 Schubert, Kurt, "The Sermon on the Mount and the Qumran Texts", The Scrolls and the New Testament, edited by Krister Stendahl, London, SCM, 1957, p. 320-327.

27 Black, Matthew, The Scrolls and Christian Origins, Studies in the Jewish Background of the New Testament, Toronto, Nelson, 1961, p. 88.

28 Isaksson, Op. Cit., p. 146-147.

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disregarded. It is possible²⁹ that the First Letter to the Corinthians (written 50-55 A.D.) was shared with other Churches and, particularly, with those 'at home' in Palestine. The practice³⁰ and theology of celibacy may have had early beginnings. Matthew³¹, in his selection and arrangement of material from his sources in the late first century, may have been influenced by Paul. Certainly, sayings were abroad which praised those who left their families for the sake of the Gospel (Mt 19:29; Mk 10:29-30; Lk 14:26; 18:29). Perhaps, the parable of the "Ten Virgins" (Mt 25:1-13) is a reference to a group of

29 Maly, Op. Cit., p. 52, refers to Josef Blinzler, "Εἰς τὸν εὐνοῦχοι Zur Auslegung von Mt 19:12", in Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, Vol. 48, 1957, p. 266; 1 Cor 7 and Mt 19:3-12 cover essentially the same ground, though each in its own way and with its own emphasis.

30 Ford, J. Massingberd, A Trilogy on Wisdom and Celibacy, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1967, vii-256 p. The author places the beginning of celibacy in the mid-second century. We would agree, if she means as a well-defined institution in the Church. As she says: "Although one must deny any organized or widespread practice of celibacy in the first two centuries of the Christian era, one notes that (...) there is always fragmentary yet decisive evidence that a few outstanding people did (...) practice continence and some even embraced virginity." P. 217-218.

31 Isaksson, Op. Cit., p. 106.

'consecrated contemplatives'³² or 'students of wisdom'³³ existing either in fact or as an idea in the process of becoming acceptable to the Christian community.

That experience colors primitive tradition is a truism, but this process is not necessarily corruption; it may equally well be interpretation and valid interpretation.³⁴

d) Special Characteristics of Matthew.- Several characteristics special to Matthew's gospel shed light on our pericope: the concepts of fulfillment, the kingdom and eschatology, and the role of the disciples' questions.

The theme of promise³⁵ and fulfillment is basic and perhaps original to Matthew. In this is the Jewish-Christian character of his gospel particularly evident: Jesus is presented as the fulfillment of the Old Testament (5:17). He is superior to the Law, the New Moses who fulfills in the sense of perfecting, ennobling, surpassing--of raising to

32 Maly, Op. Cit., p. 52, quotes Stanley, "Kingdom to Church", New Testament Studies, 16(1955), p. 1-29, which is based on the supposition that Matthew's gospel was written from the teachings of Our Lord and as an application to the Church.

33 Ford, Op. Cit., p. 111-118 and 227.

34 Taylor, Vincent, The Gospels, A Short Introduction, London, Epworth, 1962 (1930), p. 77.

35 Stendahl, Op. Cit., p. 188-190; Davies, "Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come", p. 92.

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new heights (5:21-48; 19:3-9). The New Law³⁶ is not new as something totally different but as the revelation of treasures already there, hidden away in the Old. Where Mark turns to Moses as authority, Matthew turns to the Creator. Matthew presents the teaching of Jesus not as against Mosaic Law but as against the Rabbinic interpretation of it. What is new is the understanding. Thus a new dimension of morality challenges men: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48). The views on sex, marriage, and fecundity revealed in the narrative (19:3-15), call men to personal fulfillment according to an understanding in which the old is carried to new heights.

In this gospel³⁷ the disciples are disciples precisely because they have understood the call of Jesus. Matthew omits, or interprets differently, all Mark's references to the disciples' lack of understanding, for it has already been given to them. Though on occasion--the parables and enigmatic statements--the disciples question, then understanding is granted to them (Mt 13:36, 51; 19:10). In this,

36 Barth, Gerhard, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law", Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew, London, SCM, 1963 (1960), translated from the German by Percy Scott, p. 158-159.

37 Bornkamm, Günther, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held, Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew, translated from the German by Percy Scott, London, SCM, 1963 (1960) p. 105-112.

the disciples differ from the obdurate crowds. It is not a matter of natural intelligence but of an openness to revelation--of a readiness to receive. Though man's free decision is necessary it remains in the background, for it is the gift of God, the act of God on men, which is of prime importance.

In Matthew the questions and objections³⁸ of the disciples play a role in the enunciation of truth. It is always Jesus who teaches and the disciples who are among the taught. Thus their objections are never accepted by Him--as if they could teach the Master! They are merely the occasion for a restatement of the lesson with yet greater emphasis. For example: After Jesus' word to the rich young man (Mt 19:21-22) the disciples object, "Who then can be saved? (19:25); Jesus withdraws nothing; they are assured that with God's help it is possible. So it is in Mt 19:10.

According to Jewish idiom³⁹ Matthew avoids the expression 'kingdom of God' by the circumlocution 'kingdom of heaven' (5:3, 10,17; 19:12; 25:34; and many others). The kingdom of heaven is both present reality and eternal

38 Quesnell, Op. Cit., p. 343-344.

39 Argyle, Op. Cit., p. 10.

life (5:19; 7:21). The Old Testament basis⁴⁰ for the concept is the Hebrew malkûth, the active rule of God. Men express their allegiance by seeking to do His will. Thus the kingdom of heaven is God's kingship, His rule over the hearts of men. His kingdom is eternal (Ps 145:13) and universal (Ps 103:19). The Jew⁴¹ recognized God as king by right, but in fact, His reign was not yet universal--full consummation lay in the future.

An eschatological note is inherent in the concept of kingdom. Near and ever present, the kingdom is the work of God in progress; future and yet to be, it is still a promise. To what extent⁴² were Jesus' ethical precepts conditioned by the imminence of the eschaton? Neither in the Sermon on the Mount nor in His other ethical demands is there an indication that these are emergency demands, interim ethics (as in 1 Cor 7). Jesus calls some men to make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom but never for the sake of the imminence of the kingdom.

⁴⁰ Taylor, Vincent, The Life and Ministry of Jesus, London, Macmillan, 1961, p. 66-69.

⁴¹ Argyle, Op. Cit., p. 10-11.

⁴² McArthur, Harvey K., Understanding the Sermon on the Mount, New York, 1960, p. 96-97.

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2. Verse 10.-

Say to him his disciples, If thus is the case of
 λέγουσιν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ, εἰ οὕτως ἐστὶν ἡ αἰτία
 the man with the wife, it is not profitable to marry⁴³
 τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μετὰ τῆς γυναίκος, οὐ συμφέρει γαμῆσαι.

"His disciples said to him", and however their statement is interpreted, it carries a question; Jesus is asked to say more. The very loftiness⁴⁴ of His conception of marriage, the mutual consecration and life-long commitment, quite understandably upset the disciples. They⁴⁵ were surprised and perhaps dismayed over the statement of the equality of men and women, and the loss of easy divorce. Of the several disciples present feelings must have varied when this word was first heard. As time went on and practice complicated theory, no doubt reactions widened to cover the whole range of human response: consternation (Léon-Dufour), concern (Jones), wonder (Vawter), shock (Lillie), petulance (Smith), astonishment (Filson, Fenton), insolence (Manson), and general ill-humor (Bernard)--depending on the tone read

⁴³ Berry, George Ricker, The Interlinear Literal Translation of the Greek New Testament, Chicago, Follett, 1966.

⁴⁴ Filson, Op. Cit., p. 207; see also George A. Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 7, 1951, p. 481.

⁴⁵ Lagrange, Op. Cit., p. 90; Pierre R. Bernard, The Mystery of Jesus, translated by Francis V. Manning, Vol. 2, Staten Island, N.Y., Alba House, 1966, p. 119.

into it. When the gospel came to be written in final form, v. 10 could well be the exclamation not only of the disciples but of the young Church generally⁴⁶.

There is general agreement that this verse is an editorial transition between the sayings on marriage and non-marriage. It has two editorial elements characteristic of the First Gospel. First, the expression⁴⁷: "It is (not) expedient" is found only in Matthew (5:29-30; 18:6; 19:10) of the synoptics. Second, there is an air⁴⁸ of mystery about it: The setting, the disciples alone with Jesus questioning Him, is a literary form used by Matthew to introduce something special. From the editorial point of view the verse is necessary to the narrative. It is the moment of respite between two steep climbs, the plateau between mountains.

When the disciples say, "It is not expedient to marry," they were aware of some who were not married. They had heard of, or even known, the Essenes. There was talk⁴⁹ among their own of leaving one's family or, perhaps, of not

⁴⁶ Buttrick, Op. Cit., p. 488.

⁴⁷ Fenton, J.C., The Gospel of St. Matthew, Baltimore Penguin, 1963, p. 310.

⁴⁸ Quesnell, Op. Cit., p. 350.

⁴⁹ Manson, T.W., The Sayings of Jesus, As Recorded in the Gospels According to St. Matthew and St. Luke, London SCM, 1949 (1937), p. 215.

founding one (Mt 8:21; 10:37; Lk 9:59-62; 14:26; 18:29; Mk 10:28-30) with the resultant clash of claims and loyalties (1 Cor 6:12--7:40). And, above all, there was the example⁵⁰ of Jesus to prevent an easy dismissal of the idea.

Verse 10 is then taken as arising quite naturally from the discussion on Christian marriage. Either it came spontaneously from the disciples according to the text, or more likely, it is an artificial transition between originally independent logia now neatly welded into a unity. In either case, it expresses graphically the somewhat breathless response of sincere men met with a sudden challenge to their faith, and a call to greatness in a matter which touched them to the heart--the expression sexuality was to take in their lives. Verse 10 is proof that they understood the dignity and the difficulty of the marriage consecration, and it opened the way for Jesus' declaration of a Christian alternative to Christian marriage.

3. Verse 11.-

But he said to them, Not all receive this
 ὁ-δε̐ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, οὐ πάντες χωροῦσιν τὸν-
 word, but (those) to whom it has been given;
 λόγον-τοῦτον, ἀλλ' οἷς δέδοται;

a) This saying.-- The interpretation of Mt. 19:10-12

50 Filson, Op. Cit., p.207; Fenton, Op. Cit., p.310.

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is largely determined by the antecedent assigned to τὸν-
λόγον-τοῦτον, variously translated as: this word (DV),
this precept (RSV), this saying (KJV), this lesson (~~K-LV~~)
(Kleist). Since there is no general agreement among
exegetes, the various possibilities are outlined. The two
questions posed by the Pharisees concerning divorce for any
cause (v. 3) and the Mosaic writ of dismissal (v. 7) are
not properly sayings and need not be considered. There are
then four sayings, three of Jesus (vv. 4-6; 8-9; 11-12) and
one of the disciples (v. 10).

First the word⁵¹ which all do not accept could very
well be Jesus' stand on divorce and remarriage (v. 8-9). It
is easy to grant that many did not go along with Him. But,
Christ did not determine the norms of His kingdom by popular
vote. He simply made a statement based on the way God

⁵¹ Lillie, William, Studies in New Testament Ethics,
London, Oliver and Boyd, 1961, p. 125, proposes the argu-
ment that 'this saying' refers to divorce, but he doubts
that Jesus really made such a concession; McNeile, Allan
Hugh, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, The Greek Text
with Introduction, Notes, and Indices, London, Macmillan,
1915, p. 275, says that if the reference is to the
indissolubility of marriage, then Jesus' reply is "difficult"
Quesnell, Op. Cit., p. 344, sees the reference to the
divorce question (v. 3-9) and on this basis he makes an
interesting interpretation of v. 12 as a call to eternal
fidelity to one's marriage partner.

ordained it to be from the beginning. Jesus⁵² could not, logically, have reversed or seriously weakened His position in His next word. He is one who taught with authority (Mt 7:28). Also, the practice of permanent marriage from the earliest days of the Church argues against any such concession. When Paul spoke for monogamous marriage his authority was "from the Lord" (1 Cor 7:10-11) but, when he came to make an exception he spoke on his own.

Second, if 'this saying'⁵³ is taken as a reference to Jesus' enunciation of God's plan as set forth in Genesis (v. 4-6), it is difficult to see why the disciples would find it a hard saying, or why Jesus would claim that it is not for all.

τὸν-λόγον-τοῦτον is translated, and interpreted, as: "what I have said"⁵⁴ in the English version of the Jerusalem Bible. If the reference must be to a saying of Jesus, it could hardly be ahead to what has yet to be said

⁵² Meyer, Heinrich August Wilhelm, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, translated, revised and edited by William P. Dickson and William Stewart, Vol. 11, Edinburgh, Clark, 1884, p. 27.

⁵³ Tasker, Op. Cit., p. 183; see also footnotes 10 and 11 on p. 184.

⁵⁴ The Jerusalem Bible, Darton, Longman and Todd edition, 1966, Mt 19:11: "But he replied, 'It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it is granted.'" (The underlining is mine.).

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concerning eunuchs (v. 12). It must point back either to His exposition of God's plan for the man-woman relationship (vv. 4-6), or to the divorce-remarriage teaching (vv. 8-9), or most likely, to the whole doctrine on marriage (vv. 3-9).

However, if 'this saying' does refer to the Lord's own words (whatever the interpretation given to them), many inconsistencies⁵⁵ arise. Those who 'receive' it are those who understand the logion either to grant remarriage in some cases, or not to grant remarriage at all. What they receive is the gift to understand marriage fully, or the gift to understand divorce. Besides the fact that Jesus is made to contradict Himself, the ambiguity argues against any such interpretation.

It is logical⁵⁶ to accept 'this saying' as referring to the last thing said, the disciples' comment on the relative value of marriage and non-marriage. The flow of thought is then easy: Marriage is a high calling, as planned by God, though it may be difficult to carry out--so, suggest

55 Allen, Op. Cit., p. 205.

56 Maldonatus, John, A Commentary on the Holy Gospels, translated from the Latin by George J. Davie, Vol.2, London, Hodges, 1888, p. 135; also see Filson, p. 207; Fenton, p. 311; Manson, p. 215; Lagrange, p. 371, does not quite go along with this: "τὸν-λόγον. ne peut être précisément ni la parole qui va être prononcée, ni celle qu'ont dite les disciples. C'est plutôt une variante de αἰτία: cette affaire, ce point".

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the disciples, it might be as well not to marry. Jesus⁵⁷ picks up the remark and without withdrawing any of His word on Christian marriage, proceeds to build a new concept in conjunction with the old.

Finally, if the reply⁵⁸ of Jesus is to be redactionally conceivable it must be understood not as approving of, but as improving upon, the suggestion-objection just proffered, much like the qualifying: "Well, yes ... but", heard today.

b) Not all receive (Οὐ πάντες χωροῦσιν).— What does it mean 'to receive' what someone says? Though scholars agree on the interpretation, the range of emphasis is wide. Merely to hear, or even to listen, seems not strong enough to convey the depth of meaning here intended.

There is a definite intellectual tone⁵⁹ when 'to receive' is taken as an apprehension of the intellect. But more than an assent⁶⁰ of the mind, it involves the capacity

57 Lagrange, Op. Cit., p. 371; Quesnell, Op. Cit., p. 357; Jones, Op. Cit., p. 217.

58 Quesnell, Op. Cit., p. 344.

59 Meyer, Op. Cit., p. 28-29, says: "Chrysostom observes that χωρεῖν in verse 11 means "to receive" and is to be understood as referring to a spiritual reception, a receiving in the heart, so to have not only the inclination to be continent but the moral firmness of the will." p. 28.

60 Hobbs, Herschel H., An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1965, p. 261.

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in one's nature to assimilate the message that is given, to make room in one's life for the truth. This is no passive acceptance⁶¹--one does not just let it happen. It means to embrace, to accept eagerly, and to make one's own, that is, to master the lesson:

The language used (as seen in the Greek) gives a hint of the need of time and labour in the process of "mastering".⁶²

Thus there are two levels if one is 'to receive' in full what is said or taught: First, one must have the ability--the capacity, in the sense of the basic disposition to take in what is offered; second, one must use, make operative or effective--as we would say, there must be a carry over into life. 'To receive' is then both active and passive: One is prepared, acted on, in order to be able to receive; one is cooperative, that is, acting oneself--a reaching out to receive.

c) To whom it has been given (οἷς δέδοται).-- To whom has it been given? The text is clear on this point. Jesus said, "Not all".

What is it that is given? The content of what is received, that is, the capacity to understand and the

⁶¹ Kleist, J.A., "Eunuchs in the New Testament", in Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 7, No. 1, January 1945, p. 448, footnote 4.

⁶² Kleist, Op. Cit., p. 449.

readiness to make one's own 'the saying'. It is a gift⁶³ both to understand and to do, and they are not precisely the same gift. Jesus speaks here not of the gift of chastity in marriage or of chastity outside of marriage, but of the gift of understanding whichever is one's role in the kingdom.

And, who is it who gives? The Father gives⁶⁴, for it is Jesus who speaks. What is given is free, both freely bestowed and freely accepted--though, and it is a common enough experience, the gift received is not always what one would have chosen for oneself.

Not all are called to Christian marriage, so not all should expect that gift. From now on⁶⁵, there is no virtue in being married or in being non-married. Neither is great unless greatly lived, and both⁶⁶ are given by God. Of course, the Jew did not need to be told that wife and children were God's gift; that the lack of wife and children might also be God's gift was a revelation. The air of

63 Maldonatus, Op. Cit., p. 136.

64 There is a similar usage in Mt 13:11: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven". The revelation is given by the Father and received by men in the person of Jesus.

65 Hobbs, Op. Cit., p. 261.

66 Vawter, Bruce, The Four Gospels, An Introduction, New York, Doubleday, 1966, p. 277.

mystery⁶⁷ is heightened by the use of the verb 'to receive' at the beginning and again at the end of the saying, and by the fact that it is for some only: To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 13:11).

Thus in verse 11 Jesus speaks to the disciples' question on the relative value of marriage and non-marriage. He establishes a choice, both in the receiving and in the giving. Man receives; it is God who gives. The fact that more than one way is now open to men is evident in that 'not all' want to receive the same gift because not all are given the same gift. This is the revelation of verse 11.

4. Verse 12.-

For there are eunuchs who from [the] womb of
 εἰσὶν-γὰρ εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες ἐκ κοιλίας

[their] mother were born thus, and there are
 μητρὸς ἐγεννήθησαν οὕτως, καὶ εἰσιν

eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and
 εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες εὐνουχίσθησαν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καί

there are eunuchs who made eunuchs of themselves
 εἰσιν εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες εὐνούχισαν ἑαυτοὺς

for the sake of the kingdom of the heavens.
 διὰ τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν.

He who is able to receive [it] let him receive [it].
 ὁ συνάμενος χωρεῖν χωρεῖτω.

According to Matthew Jesus chose a harsh and ugly

67 Bernard, Op. Cit., p. 119.

word to introduce a startling, even revolutionary, doctrine. He took up the disciples' saying: "it is not expedient to marry", and commented on its non-universal application due to its nature as gift. Jesus⁶⁸ then by-passed the respectable word 'to marry', γαμῆσαι, and instead of 'unmarried' He chose 'eunuch'. So shocking an expression was no accident; there is more to being a eunuch than simply being unmarried. The deficiency in the Jewish bachelor could, and undoubtedly would, be remedied by taking a wife--not so the eunuch.

The eunuch⁶⁹ is incapable of marriage fulfillment. As defined in Rabbinic Judaism there are two classes of eunuch: 1. cut by nature, and 2. cut by man (Jeb 8:4bc). There was pity⁷⁰, even disgust, for the sun-eunuch, saris hamma, on whom the sun had never shone as man (Ws 3:14); even more was the man-made eunuch, saris adam, despised (Eccl 20:4; 30:20). By law, he could be punished if the condition were sought in order to obtain a position in a

68 Maly, Op. Cit., p. 49; Blinzler, Op. Cit., p.257, if verse 12 referred to those who live in celibacy the word ἀγαμέμνεις would be used, but Jesus used εὐνοῦχοι. He is, therefore, not referring to the bachelor but to the impotent. Celibacy is then defined as a kind of impotence.

69 Blinzler, Op. Cit., p. 255.

70 Herod the Great relied largely on eunuchs as household officers (Antiquities xvi. 8.1 ff); Graves, Robert and Joshua Pedro, The Nazarene Gospel Restored, London, Cassell, 1953, p. 202.

royal household (Shab 111a: b2 from Lv 22:24).

In the New Testament the word eunuch is used in two contexts only, in Acts 8 where it is an official title and in Mt 19:12. It calls to mind one "emasculated and incapacitated for married life".⁷¹ Different from other men, he is condemned to loneliness.

Classes of Eunuch as Defined by Christ.- The first includes those born, physically or emotionally, unsuited to sexual life. Then there are those made sterile by operation or accident. Both groups may marry, but are denied the fulfillment of their marriage in children. Perhaps, these two classes⁷² make but one, including all those who cannot enter fully into marriage because of some defect which they did not choose themselves. Though they may come to accept their state, alone and different, there is no remedy.

There is another category⁷³ of eunuch. Those who do not marry because a suitable partner has not been found, or those who did marry, are divorced, and because of their understanding of God's will (v. 3-9), do not remarry. These have, in effect, been made eunuchs, not physically but morally. They are the unwanted ones, and, certainly, they

71 Lagrange, Op. Cit., p. 371.

72 Manson, Op. Cit., p. 216.

73 Bernard, Op. Cit., p. 120.

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did not choose life alone, forced on them as it is by circumstances. This is the second class.

The third is composed of those who have made themselves eunuchs. These freely choose their state of life.

The three classes could be reduced to two: Those⁷⁴ incapable of marriage due to physical causes and those excluded from marriage fulfillment for social reasons, form only one class--the unwilling eunuchs; these neither sought nor do they want their present condition. Their only freedom is that they may choose to live, without bitterness, the life of loneliness forced upon them. On the other hand, the willing eunuchs drawn to the same form of life, remain free in their choice. Perhaps then, all three⁷⁵ are οἱς δέσονται either in the form of outward circumstances or in a spiritual commitment. All are rightly called eunuchs. But, it is in no way desirable to be a eunuch while it is certainly desirable, for some, 'to be eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven'.

Very few exegetes⁷⁶ favor the realistic interpretation that some men are called to self-emasculation, while

74 Fenton, Op. Cit., p. 311.

75 McNeile, Op. Cit., p. 276.

76 I came across only one in modern works; Schmidt, TWNT, Vol. 1, p. 590; Schneider, TWNT, Vol. 2, p. 768, holds to the traditional view.

the disciple, even if he could not imitate their fervor could, at least, reflect upon it. Jesus' own example⁷⁷ cannot be overlooked as a clue to the correct interpretation. For Jesus⁷⁸ in His person, even more than in His words, constitutes the New Torah in which the Old is fulfilled and surpassed.

Jesus⁷⁹ and His followers were frequently blamed for their non-observance of the Law; violation of the Sabbath, neglect of purity regulations, and perhaps here, some of them were being taunted for not marrying. However, if castration⁸⁰ were encouraged by Jesus, and practiced ("for there are eunuchs") by some of His followers, surely His enemies as well as the common folk, tutored in continence from the days of Moses, would have risen in disgust and condemned so unholy and unnecessary an act of violence. At the time⁸¹ of Jesus, and before, self-emasculation for the sake of the kingdom was simply unheard of.

Certainly the expression⁸² is not to be taken

77 Legrand, Op. Cit., p. 39.

78 Davies, "Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come", p. 93-94.

79 Blinzler, Op. Cit., p. 268.

80 Manson, Op. Cit., p. 215-216.

81 Blinzler, Op. Cit., p. 260-261.

82 Dalman, Op. Cit., p. 122-123.

literally. But, the problem is no less real even if the word is understood metaphorically, for nowhere in Rabbinic literature does 'to castrate oneself' mean 'to be celibate'. Neither way does the saying conform to Rabbinic practice. In early Christian literature⁸³ the words eunuch and eunuchry have the meaning unknown to classical and Hellenistic Greek of 'celibate' and 'celibacy'. The only conclusion possible is that Jesus is using an old word in a new way. Those who make themselves eunuchs are not those who cannot marry but:

those who do not, who sacrifice their happiness,
but not their manhood, for the sake of the kingdom
of God.⁸⁴

Taught by the Word 'Eunuch'.- Eunuch was apparently the only suitable word available to Jesus. Unmarried, as the negative of married, implies a deficiency that is easily corrected. Continence, as a holy restraint, was a well-

⁸³ Manson, Op. Cit., p. 215, quotes Clement of Alexandria's definition (Paed. III, 4, 26): "The true eunuch is not he who cannot but he who will not indulge himself."

⁸⁴ Manson, Op. Cit., p. 216. Mt 19:12 does not ask anyone to 'sacrifice his happiness' anymore than 'to take up one's cross' presents suffering as an ideal. It is simply an invitation to bear the burdens of life in a Christlike way--"and follow me" (Mt 16:24). Similarly, to be a eunuch, according to the way of Jesus, is an invitation to share in the Kingdom, not to undertake a life of suffering. There is paradox but not complete contradiction: Anyone who loses his life for Jesus' sake will find it (Mt 16:25), and he will gain a hundredfold even here (Mt 19:29).

known virtue involving the temporary interruption of conjugal relations as a ritual purity prescription--and, was an implicit tribute⁸⁵ to the holiness of marriage.

The word eunuch carries with it a depth of meaning revealing several characteristics by which eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom are identified. The condition of eunuch is permanent; thus Jesus⁸⁶ points to a life-long commitment. These eunuchs made themselves eunuchs, that is, in a single act⁸⁷ they freely rendered themselves incapable of marriage. There was freedom before the choice, and there is freedom after the choice--since the act was not physical, they remain free in their choice. Finally, the word is unpleasant. It calls forth a distaste and this too, is of design, for one does not embrace such a life without a certain repugnance. "Jesus did not require self-mutilation but rather the risk and sacrifice even of things that seemed indispensable."⁸⁸

a) For there are (εἰσὶν).- There are eunuchs now. Jesus⁸⁹ speaks of a group already in existence who freely made themselves unfit for marriage. A superficial reading

85 Ford, Op. Cit., p. 29, footnote No. 37.

86 Kleist, Op. Cit., p. 447.

87 Blinzler, Op. Cit., p. 261.

88 Dibelius, Martin, The Message of Jesus, London, Nicholson and Watson, 1939, p. 164.

89 Maly, "Virginity in the New Testament", p. 49-50.

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of the phrase yields an inadequate idea of the commitment involved. In receiving⁹⁰ God's gift one is not freed from (Christian marriage) rather is one freed for (Christian non-marriage). However the act of personal commitment was sealed, it must necessarily have been a positive act, for in the words of Jesus it was "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven". What is commendable in the eunuch is not that he can be called 'eunuch', but why he remains celibate.

b) For the sake of (ἐκ).— The phrase⁹¹ 'for the sake of' in relation to the kingdom means: in view of, to be in harmony with--that is, because there is a kingdom... Care must be taken not to read into the text overtones which are not there. The phrase⁹² in question does not mean: in order to have access to the kingdom, as if celibacy were a necessary or even preferable condition. The celibate way of receiving the reign of God is for some and not for all; conversely, marriage is for others and therefore, not for all. Because of this fact, marriage⁹³ is no longer of legal,

90 Rock, Op. Cit., p. 223, quotes St. Augustine: "What we praise in virgins is not the fact that they are virgins, but that they have consecrated themselves to God by their continence."

91 Legrand, Op. Cit., p. 43.

92 Earle, Ralph, et al., "Matthew 19:10-12", The Wesleyan Bible Commentary, Vol. 4, 1964, p. 84; also Argyle, Op. Cit., p. 145.

93 Isaksson, Op. Cit., p. 151.

social, or religious obligation. But obligations have not been waived. Thus when Jesus calls some to celibacy, it is a celibacy of set purpose: for the sake of ^{the} kingdom.

c) For the sake of the kingdom of heaven (διὰ τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν). - What is the kingdom for which cause some choose the celibate way of life? It is:

'a comprehensive term for the blessings of salvation', having practically the same meaning as 'the age to come' or 'the life of the age to come'.⁹⁴

The kingdom of God (of the 'heavens' in Matthew) is the reassertion of God's dominion as King over men who at last know him, serve him and love him.⁹⁵

Obviously, one⁹⁶ does not choose celibacy, the choice is for the goal. Celibacy is merely the appropriate means, for some, to be in harmony with the kingdom. In this light⁹⁷ one cannot speak of celibacy as an asceticism. There is no question of heroic self-sacrifice. There is renunciation, but only to the extent that every choice, by its very nature, implies the rejection of one good in order to embrace the other.

94 Legrand, Op. Cit., p. 41, refers to Dalman, Words of Jesus, Edinburgh, Clark, 1902, p. 135.

95 "Introduction to Matthew" in the Jerusalem Bible, p. 12.

96 Maly, "Virginity in the New Testament", p. 51.

97 Blinzler, Op. Cit., p. 261; Buttrick, Op. Cit., p. 482, sees celibacy as a "rigorous self-denial".

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Put another way⁹⁸, more simply and effectively, the kingdom is the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price for which some, with joy, have sold all that they have (Mt 13: 44-46), "have made themselves eunuchs".

Who is called? The kingdom⁹⁹ is open to all, married and celibate alike, and its demands are equally uncompromising. God gives, and one must both reject many things and yield exclusive loyalty. Nevertheless, the things rejected and the expressions of loyalty are not the same for all. One elects marriage for himself and gives exclusive loyalty to only one woman; another rejects marriage for himself and gives exclusive loyalty to no one woman. Thus all are not called to celibacy, but all are, indeed, called to the kingdom.

Those¹⁰⁰ who cannot or must not marry for physical or emotional causes, those who do not have the opportunity much as it may be desired, those who choose to remain unmarried because of a prior commitment, are now assured of a chance to find fulfillment in the reign of God. But for celibacy, to be Christian celibacy, the motive must be "for the sake of the kingdom."

98 Grossouw, W.K., Spiritualité du Nouveau Testament, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1964, p. 41.

99 Manson, Op. Cit., p. 130.

100 Findlay, Op. Cit., p. 191; Vawter, Op. Cit., p. 277.

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How are they called? Though the call to serve the kingdom in the celibate way is a gift of God, it is not easy to discern the gift--to know the will of God. Some authors,¹⁰¹ in their interpretation of this passage, would restrict the action of God and set an order to grace, as if Jesus said that one must first be granted a particular understanding of the kingdom and then only ~~may~~ one take up the celibate way of life:

in no other circumstances, He implies, is it right to say "it is not expedient to marry", and all who can receive the principle asserted in Genesis should do so.¹⁰²

But, this is to overlook experience. God speaks to all men in their history and to every man in the existential circumstances of his life. The eunuch¹⁰³, physically or emotionally crippled, whether born so or caused to be, even through his own fault (as for instance, the foolish use of drugs) may come through a consideration of his present unfortunate condition to desire the kingdom of heaven. Those others, eunuchs in the sense that they are the unloved and unwanted among men and those who have loved and wanted

¹⁰¹ Tasker, Op. Cit., p. 183; Smith, David, The Disciples Commentary on the Gospels, The Gospel According to St. Matthew with Introduction to the Four Gospels, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1928, p. 317.

¹⁰² Tasker, Op. Cit., p. 183.

¹⁰³ Vawter, Op. Cit., p. 277.

unwisely, may now accept the harsh circumstances of their lives and thus find the kingdom. And, there are those who in a free and fully deliberate choice gladly choose to live alone for the sole reason that it is given to them by God. In whatever way the condition of 'aloneness' comes into one's life it can be the grace which if received well, leads to Christian celibacy--non-marriage lived in harmony with the kingdom.

Why are some called to celibacy? A number of reasons or purposes are offered, though they can usually be reduced to one: for the sake of works. Without the marriage bond¹⁰⁴ celibates can devote all their time and energy, they¹⁰⁵ can offer an undistracted service, they¹⁰⁶ can better face the dangers and hardships of the active apostolate in missionary lands or during the time of persecution--the choice¹⁰⁷ being made in favor of a demanding work. Such a conclusion arises from a misreading of the text. Good works are the obligation of all Christians regardless of state in life. Moreover, the celibate must work at earning a living, as all men must. The kind of work is important only as an occasion for the

104 Argyle, Op. Cit., p. 145.

105 Earle, Op. Cit., p. 84.

106 Buttrick, Op. Cit., p. 482.

107 Filson, Op. Cit., p. 207; Bernard, Op. Cit., p. 120.

outward expression of his devotion to the kingdom. A man is first a celibate, and only secondarily is he involved in a profession or trade. In itself no work is incompatible with a life of celibacy. It is not for work¹⁰⁸, even works of the Kingdom, that one embraces a life of celibacy; it is solely to be in harmony with the Kingdom.

d) He who is able to receive it let him receive it.-

'He who is able' is the man in whom the ground has been prepared for this vocation. Herein lies the mystery of the gift of God: Not only is something given, but something happens to the gifted so that the gift may bear fruit in him. The implicit warning¹⁰⁹ repeated from verse 11--let him only who is able to understand make room in his life for this gift--leaves the impression that to accept this gift just might be a dangerous, or perhaps, costly undertaking. On the other hand, there¹¹⁰ is a tone of reassurance. Jesus makes provision for those who remain in the non-married state provided it is embraced in harmony with the kingdom. Compensations will be granted if one but reach out to receive. In His call for understanding:

108 Legrand, Op. Cit., p. 44.

109 McNeile, Op. Cit., p. 276.

110 Findlay, Op. Cit., p.191.

It is fairly evident that Jesus is not appealing only for speculative appreciation: a gentle invitation underlies his words.¹¹¹

There are several possible explanations for the apparent repetition in v. 11 and v. 12d. Perhaps one or other is editorial and should be omitted. Perhaps they answer a need--repetition is a Semitic form of emphasis and the eunuch saying is hard to understand, so that the construction underlines the fact that celibacy requires the grace of God both to understand it and to live it.

It¹¹² is not pure repetition. Verse 11 speaks of the understanding of the gift, or better, of understanding as the gift. Verse 12d speaks of doing, of acting. It is probable that χρηεῖν ought to be understood not only of the speculative intelligence but of the practical. It is both an exhortation and a call, a warning and an invitation. In this sense v. 12 explains v. 11.

Moreover, v. 12¹¹³ could very well be one of the several known exclamations in the community:

¹¹¹ Jones, Alexander, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, A Text and Commentary for Students, London, Chapman 1965, p. 217.

¹¹² Lagrange, Op. Cit., p. 371.

¹¹³ McNeile, Op. Cit., p.276; Quesnell, Op.Cit., p. 344.

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He who has ears,	He who has ears to	He who is able to
let him hear	hear, let him hear	receive this let
(Mt 13:9).	(Mk 4:9).	him receive it
		(Mt 19:12d).

It is a call to a faithful and fruitful hearing of the word.

The celibate is then one who freely chooses, or at least willingly accepts, the single life as God's gift to him. It is the motive which distinguishes the bachelor of this world from the eunuch of the Kingdom. Celibacy is, for him, the most suitable way to be in harmony with the Kingdom.

As a way of life, celibacy is a permanent state. Just as the physical eunuch cannot be other than he is, the spiritual eunuch does not want to be otherwise. Because celibacy is a gift, it is given only to some and there is no obligation to accept it. The gift involves both the innate disposition to celibacy granted by God and the grateful response of men to this way of life.

CHAPTER IV

MODERN THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION OF MT 19:10-12

1. The Essence of Celibacy--Interior Dedication.--

Most commentators agree that Mt 19:12 is a recommendation to voluntary celibacy to him who feels led, or who wishes, to accept it. Josef Blinzler¹ questions this conclusion: The eunuch is not the bachelor (agamos) but one who is impotent (eunuch) and therefore, incapable of marriage fulfillment. Further, according to the Kingdom of God sermons, anything done for the sake of the Kingdom has value and significance not because of the outward deed of man but because of attachment to Jesus personally, as were some of Jesus' contemporaries, or because of the influence of Jesus' message, as are some today. Instead of saying, 'for the sake of the Kingdom' Jesus could have said, 'for my sake now'. It is impossible for those who hear this word to marry or to continue in marriage²; for them the

1 Blinzler, Josef, "εἰς τὸν ἐβνοῦχοι, Zur Auslegung von Mt 19:12", in Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, Vol. 48, 1957, p. 254-270, freely summarized.

2 According to Mt 19:6 Christ never intended men to break off an already existing marriage. Barth, Karl, Church Dogmatics, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 146: "Withdrawal from marriage to celibacy, as became the practice later, is quite out of the question for Paul: 'Art thou bound to a wife? Seek not to be loosed' (1 Cor 7:27)".

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Kingdom³ is found to be the absolutely overpowering gift of God. Though the gift effects a passionate giving up, nevertheless, its chief characteristic is a joyful dedication. Thus, v. 12 is not so much a demand to give up marriage as a demand of submission to the Kingdom, and the more the demand is met the less it seems a demand.

The difference between this interpretation and the usual one is a matter of emphasis. In the latter celibacy appears as a renunciation, a forfeiture, a heroic sacrifice, when it is in reality a simple, natural, even 'necessary' result of the realized decision for the Kingdom of God in the direct following of Jesus.

a) False Emphasis.- Blinzler's interpretation attempts to place the accent where it belongs--on the gift. A life of celibacy is then merely man's free and grateful response . But, the usual understanding of the text tends to make it a thing of man's doing, evidence of his clear-sighted choice, his moral strength, his heroic self-sacrifice. Thus⁴ the non-celibate is the lesser man and the

³ Auer, Alfons, "The Meaning of Celibacy", in The Furrow, Vol. 18, No. 6, June 1967, p. 301: "J. Blinzler's interpretation would naturally become more convincing if the text read that God Himself had made such a man unfit for marriage, because to be overwhelmed by the Kingdom is indeed pure grace."

⁴ Many commentators, in their exegesis of Mt 19:12, remark on the pride or hypocrisy to which the celibate is subject, or on the claim to a saintlier life. See Findlay, p. 191; Hobbs, p. 261; Buttrick, p. 182; also Thurian, p. 56.

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celibate some sort of a superior being. Blinzler does not succeed completely in eliminating this false note.

The weakness arises here because Mt 19:12 is studied in isolation. It is no accident that Matthew has the call to celibacy follow from a discussion of marriage. The setting is important to an understanding of both realities. Christian celibacy⁵, as we have seen, makes sense only in perspective with Christian marriage. Both are 'given' by God (Gn 2:23 and Mt 19:11), and both are Christian in so far as they are 'received' (Gn 2:24 and Mt 19:12d), that is, lived, in harmony with the Kingdom. Just as there is a difference between marriage and Christian marriage so there is between celibacy and Christian celibacy, and this difference is in the motive.

b) The Christian Motive.— Men may undertake many trades or professions in which the degree of service is limited only by the individual's capacity for love. They do not require celibacy, nor does marriage limit devotion. However, celibacy⁶ is not a profession--or work, but one of

⁵ Thurian, Max, Marriage and Celibacy, introduced by Roger Schutz, translated by Norma Emerton, London, SCM, 1959 (1955), p. 23: "A study of the undertaking of celibacy ought to be preceded by some indication of the undertaking of marriage, for these two Christian ways of life cannot be studied separately."

⁶ Morton, T. Ralph, "Foreword" to Celibacy and Marriage, by Max Thurian, Op. Cit., p. 15-16.

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the two Christian absolutes, or basic vocations, established by Christ which show forth His new order. It is the conviction of vocation, not utilitarian motives, which justify one's life choice. Christian celibacy⁷ is valid only in terms of obedience to an inner disposition or understanding of the divine will for oneself. It has no meaning or value except on a religious level as an attitude of devotion before God.

2. A Choice of Marriage or Celibacy.-

a) Marriage⁸ No Longer a Command.- Against the background of the Essenes and their views on marriage, Abel Isaksson points out that our pericope and 1 Cor 7 cover essentially the same ground. They differ markedly from the accepted Jewish practice in which a man was bound to marry, to beget children, and to have regular sexual intercourse.

Isaksson accepts the historicity of Mt 19:12 and suggests that the teaching was primarily for the disciples. Like the priests in the service of the temple, they were to

⁷ Rock, Augustine, (Ed.), Sex, Love and the Life of the Spirit, Chicago, Priory Press, 1966, p. 228; Barth, Op. Cit., p. 146.

⁸ Isaksson, Abel, Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple, A Study with Special Reference to Mt. 19:13-12 (sic) and 1 Cor. 11:3-16, Copenhagen, Lund, 1965, translated by Neil Tomkinson assisted by Jean Gray, freely summarized from p. 9-151.

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live a holy life in regard to marriage and the ministry. Nowhere in the Old Testament is divorce as such condemned. Nevertheless: "The wife of a priest cannot be a harlot, a woman defiled, nor a divorced woman", for the priest is holy to his God (Lv 21:7; Ez 44:22). Just as the Pharisees and the Essenes tended to extend the priestly ideal to all men, so did Jesus and the early Christian Church⁹.

Isaksson grants Blinzler's hypothesis that the setting of v. 12 is very likely an attack on Jesus and some of His disciples for shirking a man's duty to marry and beget sons. The function of the logion is to express the early Church's idea that not all were to remain unmarried, but only those so gifted. Moreover, v. 12 is a proof text: Jesus is the Messiah, and with Him the new age is inaugurated.

His coming means the fulfillment of the promise of a new Temple, in which the eunuchs will have a share in the blessing which was promised them in the prophecy of a new Temple in Isa 56:4-5.¹⁰

b) A Choice is Established.- That marriage is no longer of command is a logical conclusion from Mt 19:12. But, as a negative corollary to a positive statement it hardly contains the whole message. As has been seen, v. 12

⁹ Isaksson is forcing the issue here. It is hardly in order to compare either the disciples or the Pharisees to the priests of the temple.

¹⁰ Isaksson, Op. Cit., p. 151.

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is an invitation to some, together with the promise of the necessary gift, to remain unmarried for the sake of the Kingdom. Isaksson¹¹ finds prophecy and proof in the promise that in the New Covenant faithful eunuchs will be admitted, and will even precede Israel (Is 56:4-5). The childless, too, will have place (Ws 3:13-14). Thus, changes in the theology of marriage are promised:

This allows us to foresee that in the future, when the Child, the Son, the Messiah, is born a different estimation, a different theory and a different practice of marriage will at last have become possible.¹²

It¹³ was inevitable that the Israelite look upon marriage as binding on all, and procreation as its prime purpose. Only in this way could children be added to the offspring of Abraham and the hope of Israel be maintained. The coming of Christ ushered in a fundamental change (Ac 10:29,34,47). It is no longer enough to be born physically of the people of God. Now, a new birth in faith and baptism opens the way to salvation for all men (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16).

Following Gn 2:23-24, the New Testament places the purpose of marriage in the union of persons (Mt 19:5-6; Eph 5:21-31). But also, and contrary to Gn 2:18, men can now

11 Barth, Op. Cit., III, 4, p. 142.

12 Barth, Op. Cit., III, 4, p. 142.

13 Thurian, Op. Cit., p. 37.

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live alone--on the invitation of Jesus. No man¹⁴ need be alone as was Adam: Christ is his friend (Mt 28:20; Lk 12:4), he shares in the community of fellow Christians (Mt 18:19), the Holy Spirit lives in him (Ac 1:8; 2:38).

In the Christian faith, therefore, one can no longer declare without qualification that man is incomplete without a wife ...¹⁵

Marriage is no longer necessary or even normal to all men; Christ calls some to be eunuchs for the Kingdom, but they remain free in their response. A choice has been established

c) The Meaning of Choice.- Choice¹⁶ means decision and decision means giving up other alternatives in favor of one limited good. In Mt 19:10-12, Jesus was speaking to non-eunuchs (in the physical sense), to whom such a choice was possible. Each person has only one life to live and of the alternatives only one can be lived fully. And, to experience the one really, the other must be surrendered completely.

Christian celibacy is not only found in the external

¹⁴ Cole, William Graham, Sex and Love in the Bible, New York; Association Press, 1959, p. 286; also Thurian, Op. Cit., p. 69.

¹⁵ Léon-Dufour, Xavier, "The Theological Meaning of Marriage and Consecrated Celibacy", in Man Before God, Toward a Theology of Man, Roland E. Murphy (Foreword), New York, Kenedy, 1966, p. 141.

¹⁶ Rahner, Karl, "Celibacy--an Open Letter", in The Furrow, Vol. 19, No. 2, Feb. 1968, p. 62-63.

act. Just¹⁷ as outward poverty is no virtue so outward celibacy to be Christian, must be more than the lack of husband or wife. Its essence lies in an attitude, in the firm intention (v. 12d) to continue always in the single state, living a life in harmony with single dedication to the Kingdom.

According to Mt 19:11-12, the inner conviction of a divine call must determine one's decision to marry or not to marry. Karl Barth writes:

It was by realizing that the will of God for oneself is not celibacy that one was led to undertake marriage. (...) one is made free by the vocation, the gift and the grace of God.¹⁸

The New Testament teaching on marriage is to be understood in terms of the New Testament teaching on celibacy in which freedom, decision, and dedication are the characteristics of life, married or celibate, lived in harmony with the Kingdom.

3. Permanence of Marriage and Celibacy.-

a) Permanent Marriage as the Message of Mt 19:12.-

Quentin Quesnell¹⁹ understands v. 12 as referring to those

¹⁷ Piper, Op. Cit., p. 109.

¹⁸ Barth, Karl, Op. Cit., p. 143.

¹⁹ Quesnell, Quentin, "Made Themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt 19:12)", in Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 30, 1968, p. 335-358, freely summarized.

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named in v. 9 who put away their wives for porneia and are not able to remarry without committing adultery. This approach involves a shift from historical to redactional considerations in which the Sitz im Leben der Kirche is more important, because more certain, than the Sitz im Leben Jesu. He sees three problems in the traditional interpretation:

1) Paul's admission: "about virgins, I have no disposition from the Lord". 2) Redactionally, if the pericope is taken as a call to consecrated virginity then Jesus appears to approve the disciples' attack on His teaching. 3) Finally, a call to virginity or celibacy is not consistent with the rest of Matthew because he omits any reference to leaving one's wife, or not having one, in the material which he shares with Lk and/or Mk.

According to Quesnell, the true flow of thought does not entail a call to celibacy at all but a challenge to one whose wife was unfaithful not to remarry. The completeness of the Christian's self-giving in marriage is possible only to those of faith. The Christian must take the risk of staking all on one person, becoming one flesh with her, and in the case of separation or divorce of remaining loyal to the one no longer there. Such is, effectively, to make oneself a eunuch. This teaching makes sense only as a contribution to the Kingdom of Heaven.

b) Freedom and Choice Characterize 'Vocation'.-

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Quesnell's reading of Mt 19:12 is correct as far as it goes. But, there is more than one class of eunuch. Those who remain faithful to a marriage commitment even after divorce are certainly living in harmony with the Kingdom and this would seem to be what is asked in 19:3-8. They, the unwilling eunuchs, may learn to bear their loneliness, even to find peace in it, but so long as they would change their state if they could (And hope, too, is a gift of God), they have not 'made themselves eunuchs'. To face bravely a sad situation for what it is, and gladly to will something externally similar, are two quite different things, even though the end result may be the same--in this case, life alone. According to Blinzler's reading:

There are people who are from nature unsuitable for marriage, and there are people who are unsuitable because of a human failing (that is, of an unfaithful or uncongenial spouse), and there are those who for the Kingdom of Heaven have made themselves unsuitable (by a direct and joyous dedication to a life commitment incompatible with marriage).²⁰

Both are eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom, the one called through circumstances, and the other by an inner disposition. Both share the gift of God, and both are called to respond with a whole-hearted acceptance of life without a partner.

²⁰ Blinzler, Op. Cit., p. 259. (The parentheses are mine.).

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However²¹, Quesnell's narrow interpretation has unfortunate consequences. If celibacy²² is overlooked as a possible alternative, then marriage remains the normal and ordinary, even necessary, life for all. It is a right, which becomes a binding obligation; in no sense is it a vocation. But, this is not so. After Jesus 'not all' are called to the one state. A vocation implies the chance to choose otherwise; freedom is of its essence. There is no hint of command--"He who is able to hear, let him ..." (Mt 19:12d). He is free to refuse, and therefore free to choose.

c) The Duration of Commitment.- It is difficult²³ to see how a call to celibacy in 19:12 can be considered inconsistent with the rest of Matthew. Actually, there is very little said, positively, about marriage, and even if there were a great deal, cannot the author be, as was Jesus Himself, in favor of both marriage and celibacy? Why must a call to one be read as a disparagement of the other?

21 Legrand, Lucien, The Biblical Doctrine of Virginity, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1963, p. 40, footnote 1, criticizes Dupont: "According to J. Dupont, (Marriage et Divorce dans l'Évangile, Bruges, 1959, pp 218ff) the saying would refer to the case of husbands separated from their wives. This is a rather far-fetched Sitz im Leben, moreover it overlooks completely the reference to Jesus' own example."

22 Thurian, Op. Cit., p. 23 and 10.

23 Maly, Eugene H., "Virginity in the New Testament", in Marian Studies, Vol. 13, 1962, p. 52-53.

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There²⁴ is considerable difference between not taking a wife in the first place, and leaving one's wife (If that is what Lk 18:29; 14:26; Mk 10:29 really mean.). The command is to cleave to, or cling to, not to leave one's wife, except for a short time to pray (1 Cor 7:5). In view of Mt 19:3-12 the only way to renounce marriage is not to contract it.

Men²⁵ are advised to weigh the consequences before making a commitment (Mt 16:24f and especially Lk 14:28-31) but once made there is no question of a temporary or limited duration (Lk 9:62). Love does not anticipate limit or end. The commitment is permanent:

The Christian celibate has lost spiritually--as the eunuch physically--a possibility of human existence which he will not recover.²⁶

There²⁷ is first freedom to make the choice and then lasting commitment, both for the married and for the celibate. The permanence of the one supports the permanence of the other. Celibacy is by its very definition (v. 12) permanent.

24 Legrand, Op. Cit., p. 61; also Isaksson, Op. Cit. p. 93.

25 Thurian, Op. Cit., p. 103.

26 Thurian, Op. Cit., p. 56.

27 Maly, Eugene H., "Celibacy", in Bible Today, No. 34, Feb. 1968, p. 2393-5; Thurian, Op. Cit., p. 88-103.

4. Continence--Virginity--Celibacy.--

a) Early Practice Continence rather than Virginity.-

J. Massingberd Ford²⁸ finds no clear reference to celibacy among the peoples of Jewish faith in pre-Christian times. In the light of this fact, Christ's word in Mt 19:10-12 is truly revolutionary²⁹.

Though men are invited to celibacy, there is no dominical statement which counsels such a state for women. Virginity, as a possible way of life, arose only later as part of the emancipation and education of women. In the scriptures, the word virgin does not unambiguously point to physical integrity. It is εὐνοῦχος rather than παρθένος which denotes complete celibacy for the early Church.

Miss Ford sees Mt 19:10-12 as more than a call to an eschatological continence (as Lk 14:26; Mt 10:37-39; 24:19 might be). It is an invitation to celibacy or to a continence of a more permanent state, as the word eunuch clearly indicates. Though celibacy came into common practice only

²⁸ Ford, J. Massingberd, A Trilogy on Wisdom and Celibacy, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1967, p. vii-256, freely summarized. The author does not discuss Mt 19:10-12 in great detail. Her conclusions are drawn more from 1 Cor 7 and from developments in the early Church.

²⁹ Ford, Op. Cit., p. 34, does not think that the Essenes were celibate in the way Christians understand the word. She would say that they did not practice absolute celibacy, but continence.

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in the mid-third century, the symbolic sense of virginity preceded the practical. Thus, Miss Ford finds a connection between 'incipient' Jewish mysticism, as it is found in the midrash on the Canticle of Canticles, and the 'symbolic' use of the term virgin in Rev 14:4 and Mt 25:1-13, and also in 2 Cor 11:2. Though the theological import of virginity was appreciated to some extent very early, the practice was the practice of continence rather than virginity. Nevertheless, the words of Jesus do indicate a state already in existence when He spoke.

b) Dedication, not Physical Virginity, the Basis for Celibacy.— Surely the words of Christ are addressed to all men--that is, to men and to women. His word, eunuch, does have a masculine ring, but it is no greater problem to pass from the obvious masculine sense to include the feminine, than from the literal in the first two classes of eunuch to the metaphorical in the third.

Miss Ford's distinction between celibacy and absolute celibacy is unfortunate. The qualifying adjective arises from the discussion of the concept of virginity. It³⁰ would probably be better to drop the word 'virgin' from

³⁰ Legrand, Op. Cit., p. xiv-xvi, defends the use of the word virgin, and asks: "Is it not possible to remain a virgin without a superiority complex and to do good without pride."; Thurian, Op. Cit., p. 56, finds Christian celibacy the only suitable word if one is to avoid the impression of judgement, superiority, merit, or hypocrisy.

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specifically religious vocabulary. But, having done so, there is no point in cluttering up the new word 'celibacy' with shades of meaning obviously not of concern to Christ. It mattered not at all to Him if a new follower were married, widowed, virgin, or prostitute at the time of conversion. What was of importance was, and is, his choice from that time on. If he marries, or continues in a marriage already contracted, it is for all time, or if he chooses, henceforth, to remain in single chastity then he is a Christian celibate --and, for all time. Whether his physical state is that of 'virgin' or not is irrelevant--if he happens to be one, he has no claim to ~~some~~ special status. Nothing of the sort is even hinted at in Mt 19:10-12. In fact, celibacy, as defined in the Gospel, cannot be taken as a call to virginity, except in the religious sense of the word as a call to a whole-hearted devotion to the Lord; or, incidentally, as when the gift is received by one still a virgin then, of course, celibacy involves perpetual virginity.

Each is called to live the life 'given' him, and to live it, henceforth, for Christ. The past is unimportant. What matters is the present state of dedication, and its import for the future. If celibacy³¹ is one's gift and

31 Armstrong, M.R., "Virginity in the New Testament", in Bible Today, No. 32, Nov. 1967, p. 2247.

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choice then the purpose and aim in life will be harmony with the reality of the redemption. Celibacy witnesses to this reality.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In answer to the question: Did Christ really call some men to be celibate--to remain for a lifetime without wife or husband, and children? the answer is clearly, yes. And though the notion of celibacy was, and still is, new enough to be startling, men were not completely unprepared for the word of Jesus in Mt 19:10-12.

Certain concepts arising from the ritual-myths of the ancient Near East form a general background to the notion of celibacy. The idea of complete devotion was symbolized in the 'virgin', whether true virgin or sacred prostitute; and, the need for permanence in dedication was met in the irrevocable commitment of the eunuch.

The Hebrews shared in the common heritage of the surrounding nations. The notions of sex and worship, and the relationship of the two, were taken up and adapted to the particular needs of the unique religion of the people of Yahweh.

The balanced attitude of the Hebrew toward sexuality in all its manifestations was the fruit of his understanding of creation. Unlike the pagan, sex was not conceived of as 'holy'. It was a thing of creation, and though ordained by God it was not set apart but belonged to the normality of everyday life. Rather than using sex as a means of contact

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with the divine, the Hebrew abstained from it at times of worship.

The concepts of holiness as devotion through Law, and of sexuality as a creational value made of continence a real possibility. Again, unlike the pagan, continence was a regular and 'holy' part of the life of every faithful Jew. Thus Judaism condemned eunuchry as a crime against the Creator; mutilation was unnecessary, and temporary continence a simple fact in everyman's life.

There was no place in Judaism for lifelong physical virginity preserved as an expression of devotion. Nevertheless, 'virginity' was accepted as a symbol of dedication to God as is seen in such terms as Virgin Daughter of Sion, and in the metaphor of Israel Bride of Yahweh. 'Virginity' here carries the old religious meaning of devotion to the gods as fidelity to Yahweh.

The Essenes lived in expectation of the Day of the Lord. The notion of permanent continence arose among them as the obvious means to secure cultic purity and to be always in a state of readiness for the eschaton. It seems certain that some of them, over several generations, practiced a form of celibacy. Whether they never married or were married first for a time, they were still celibate (virginity is not the question here). The point is that they did live in what was a permanent state of non-marriage and their

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motive was religious--they waited on the Lord.

Thus Judaism taught, and over the centuries clearly demonstrated the possibility of continence. Virginity of the heart, that is, fidelity to God through Law was the ideal. The Jewish sectarians of Qumran united the two, continence and complete dedication, into their practice of celibacy.

Then, according to Matthew, Jesus came and in a few words called some men to be eunuchs for the Kingdom. The historicity of Mt 19:10-12 is beyond doubt: Jesus said it. The arrangement of the text with the eunuch statement arising out of a discussion of marriage may well be the choice of the editor. Nevertheless, the whole narrative of Mt 19:3-12, as we have it, must be read integrally if one is to understand the meaning as intended by Matthew and ultimately by Jesus Himself.

According to the word of Jesus some men are called to a way of life as permanent as the physical eunuch's state. But men are free for they now have the option to accept His invitation to live like the eunuch or not. Furthermore, and most important, the motive for 'celibacy according to Jesus' is the one uniquely Christian thing: For the sake of the Kingdom. The Qumran people may well have been celibates, but they were not Christian celibates.

As a gift, celibacy involves a double aspect: first,

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freedom on the part of God to give; and second, freedom on the part of men to receive. The man who receives it is prepared, that is, he is gifted with the capacity or disposition to celibacy, and when he accepts he freely meets the gift, with the active desire and positive effort, to live the celibate life.

Finally, the setting of the revelation of celibacy in the midst of a discussion of marriage is important to an understanding of both Christian realities. It points to what is involved in the commitment. Celibacy is not just being unmarried. Its essence is a matter of single dedication as defined by the one Christian motive suggested by Jesus: To be in harmony with the Kingdom. One is free to accept the gift or not--if it is given, and because a choice has been established neither marriage nor celibacy is a command. Choice necessarily involves the sacrifice of the one to have the other. There must be permanent commitment both in marriage and in celibacy. As a permanent state of continence, celibacy does not necessarily require virginity, though spiritual virginity--complete dedication--is of the essence of celibacy.

In conclusion: Mt 19:10-12 contains a clear call to celibacy--a permanent state of non-marriage undertaken freely because one has the gift of God to do so, and for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

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