

A Psychological Perspective on Integral Virginity in the Consecrated Virgin

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Let us today reflect about integral virginity: physical and empowered by the Prayer of Consecration when the Holy Spirit consecrates a woman who has received the gift (a “new grace”) of virginity.

The text of the prayer of consecration of virgins that is found in the revised Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity (May 31, 1970) is a great gift to the virgins of today because it keeps the same powerful words used by Popes and Bishops in consecrations of virgins in the ancient Church. The earliest known edition of the prayer is from the Leonian Sacramentary, which is generally attributed to Pope Leo the Great, 440-461 A.D. The prayer reflects an understanding of the great grace of virginity that had been given to the virgins of the early Church. St. Ambrose spoke of this in his treatise on virginity, written to his older sister Marcelina, as he recalled her consecration ceremony twenty-five years earlier, in the year 352 A.D., by Pope Liberius in the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome. (See *The Lamp*, USACV, Vol 21, Issue 1, March 19, 2016)

The ancient teaching of the Fathers of the Church leads to the unchangeable “essence” of integral virginity. Consecrated virgins have the joy to receive the confirmation of this “new grace” (homily in the Rite of Consecration of Virgins - Roman Pontifical) that is physical, spiritual, and ritual. By “ritual”, what is meant is that the Church through the ministry of the Bishop makes the virgin a sacred sign of the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ, Bridegroom of the Church: “God himself is its source. It is he, infinitely pure and holy, who gives the grace of virginity. Those to whom he gives it are seen by the Fathers of the Church as images of the eternal and all holy God” (*ibid.* Roman Pontifical).

From my personal perspective as a doctor in clinical psychology, there is no philosophical or psychological theory that is able to clarify why a woman can give the integrity of her being to the Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, from the time of her mother’s womb, where she received the gift of virginity. Despite their young age, most of the ancient virgins of the primitive Church were [in their] about 12 years old when they gave up their physical bodies to death in order to keep the integrity of their virginity for the kingdom of the Eternal Spouse.

The Eternal Father who created the gift of virginity first for the Mother of His Son, is the author of integral virginity. He desired to show in the renewal of the creation of human nature the essence of His eternal virginity and the virginity of His Son, who is true man and true God. The essence of virginity is in the new Eve, Mary of Nazareth, who is true woman and the Mother of God’s Son. The Lord Jesus Christ wants to perpetuate the essence of integral virginity as a sign of His Kingdom, as we observe in His teaching to those who tried to catch Him on the meaning of marriage in heaven: “Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead — have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of

Jacob' (Exodus 3:6) He is not the God of the dead but of the living." When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching"(Mt. 22: 29-32).

The Instruction "Ecclesiae Sponsae Imago" is very profound in teaching us that it is for the High Priest, our Divine Lord Jesus Christ, that we live an integral understanding of the received gift of virginity: "Virginity is valued as a positive quality only in relation to future marriage, and with explicit reference to the condition of the woman (Deut. 22:13-21), because it represents the intimacy reserved to the spouses. In particular, the high priest is required to marry a virgin for reasons of ritual purity (Lev 21:10-14)." (See *ESI*, The Biblical Foundation of Consecrated Virginity, n. 11). This quote from the Instruction of Congregation of Consecrated Life confirms what our Divine Lord Jesus Christ has taught us.

The first paragraph of ESI n. 88 states: "In vocational guidance and when there is need to describe the characteristics of this vocation and the requirements for admission to consecration, the condition of virginity will be presented starting with the rich symbolism of its biblical foundations, within the framework of an anthropological vision solidly based on Christian revelation. On this basis the different dimensions, physical, psychological and spiritual, are integrated and considered in their dynamic connection to the lived history of the person and in openness to the unceasing action of divine grace that directs, guides and invigorates her on the path of holiness."

Integral virginity for consecration, however, is not a mere "rich symbolism," but is an integral grace. In addition to being a "framework of an anthropological vision," it is also, as the Vatican Council taught us: anthropological in the situation of the human being, relational in the social context of the human being, vocational in the call to be for Jesus Christ and His Church, and an ongoing process in witness to the particular vocation one has received. The consecrated virgin is called to live the integration of the concept of her being with the action of the divine grace of virginity. (See *Gaudium et spes* 1:3 and 64:3).

The most concerning point in the Instruction appears in the last lines of the second paragraph of n. 88. The first paragraph had established that admission to consecration is in reference to the integration and consideration of the different dimensions, physical, psychological and spiritual "in their dynamic connection to the lived history of the person and in openness to the unceasing action of the divine grace that directs, guide and invigorates her on the path of holiness." In our vocation there is not a "dynamic force" but an integration between our body, soul and grace. This means that the human psychology is more than a "dynamic connection;" rather, it is a zone of confluence between body, soul and divine grace. By the way, the "dynamic" theory comes from the "dynamic physiology" of Brucke, 1874, and adopted by Sigmund Freud as a "psychic-energy" in that the human personality is also an "energy-system" and that the function of psychology is to investigate the modifications, transmissions and conversions of psychological energy with the personality which shapes and determines it. (See Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy "The Life and Theory of Sigmund Freud.")

From the basis of this “dynamic connection to the lived history of the person,” the instruction proceeds to establish: “In this context it should be kept in mind that the call to give witness to the Church’s virginal, spousal and fruitful love for Christ is not reducible to the symbol of physical integrity. Thus to have kept her body in perfect continence or to have practised the virtue of chastity in an exemplary way, while of great importance with regard to the discernment, are not essential prerequisites in the absence of which admittance to consecration is not possible.”

This statement is a contradiction to the Vatican Council's teaching that human nature is total and indivisible (“*Homo unus ac totus*”). It is a contradiction of the grace of God, which is not determined by “psychic-energy” but by a confluence of the integral human being, empowered by the energy of the Holy Spirit. The history of the virginal vocation beginning with our Blessed Mother, the Virgin of Nazareth, is empowered by the grace of God but not from physical energy nor from psychic energy but by the will of the humble virgin who allowed the Holy Spirit to overshadow her as she said the eternal YES to the Father’s gift for her. The consecrated virgin, by the power of the Holy Spirit, also gives up her body, soul and will with her Yes, as she follows the virginal steps of her Queen and Mother.