

UNIT 3C: MINISTRIES AND MISSION

81: Bishop, Priest and Deacon

This lecture, “Bishop, Priest and Deacon,” is very much linked with Lecture 86 on ecclesiology, because the ministries of the bishop, the priest and the deacon flow out of the nature of the Church. As Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) has suggested, **“everything in the Church is done in the name of the bishop.”**¹ Just as Metropolitan John has stressed the need to approach the relationship of the bishop, the Divine Eucharist and the Church in an historical and liturgical context, **this lecture considers the three major orders of Christian priesthood—bishop, priest and deacon—in a similar historical and liturgical perspective,** because “the Church lives and moves in space and time as an historical reality” and because all three of these ministries are exercised in large part in “the church building in which the Eucharist is celebrated [which] represents the very Kingdom of God whose ‘realm’ the Church is in microcosm.”²

This historical and liturgical focus invites a consideration of Christian priesthood in six contexts: (1) its roots in the Temple and the synagogue; (2) in the Apostolic Church; (3) in the pre-Constantinian Church; (4) in the Constantinian and post-Constantinian Church; and (5) in the contemporary diocesan model, with an appendix on (6) the role of celibacy. A benefit of such an *historical* approach is that a story unfolds of how leadership has been and might be exercised in the Church, while the *liturgical* dimension links this story of leadership with the development of worship and theology.

¹ John D. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries*, trans. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001), p. 7.

² Zizioulas, pp. 247, 2.

I. The Roots of the Threefold Ministry in The Temple and the Synagogue

When Jesus was born about 6 or 5 BC, at the time of King Herod, the Jewish people had already been worshiping God for nearly 1,500 years. How they were to worship had been revealed to them by God and “was patterned after things in heaven.”³ Since **“the worship of God in The Temple in Jerusalem was the first and most prominent focus of Jewish worship,”**⁴ it was appropriate that Jesus himself should be presented there as an infant (Luke 2:22), go there as a boy (Luke 2:41-42), teach there as a man (Mark 12:1-44), and that the Temple should be “the scene of the decisive moments of his life.”⁵ Indeed, even after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Apostles—accurately described as “fulfilled Jews ..who recognized and accepted Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah”⁶—continued to worship in the Temple precincts (Acts 2:46, 5:12); and when the Angel of the Lord freed the Apostles from prison, he told them: “Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life [i.e. the life of Jesus]” (Acts 5:20).

While the Temple was the place of worship for the key Jewish holidays and for all sacrifices, “as time went on the most frequent place of worship became the synagogue, which was comparable to a local church or parish;”⁷ and it was in the synagogue in Nazareth that Jesus continued “His custom” of entering the synagogue each Sabbath day and began his public ministry (Luke 4:14-21) and then during the spring and summer of A.D. 27 taught in many synagogues throughout the region (Matthew 4:23-25; Mark 1:35-39; Luke 4:42-44),⁸ as was the custom later of Paul and his companions in each new city that they entered (Acts 17:1-2; 9:20; 13:5; 13:14; 14:1; 17:10; 18:4; 18:19; 19:8). **In view of the prominence of both the**

³ Benjamin D. Williams & Harold B. Anstall, *Orthodox Worship: A Living Continuity with the Synagogue, the Temple and the Early Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life, 1990), pp. 9-10. The Biblical evidence includes Exodus 12-13, 25-31; Isaiah 6; Daniel 7 and Revelation 4-5.

⁴ Williams & Anstall, p. 10.

⁵ Georges Barrois, *Jesus Christ and the Temple* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press [SVSP], 1980), p. 11.

⁶ Williams & Anstall, p. 7.

⁷ Williams & Anstall, pp. 10-11.

⁸ For the dating of events in the life of Christ, see the New American Standard Bible, pp. 1408-1410.

Temple and the synagogue in the life of the Jewish people in first century Palestine, in the life of Jesus and in the life of the Apostles, it is necessary to ask: In what ways did this form of worship provide the roots for the development of the threefold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon?

The High Priest was the head of the Levitical priesthood, a successor to Aaron (Exodus 28), with a primary responsibility to supervise and preside at Temple worship. His high office and lavish vestments indicated that he was “Holy to the Lord,” precisely as the mitre he carried proclaimed. In addition to this important religious role, at the time of Jesus, the high priest was also head of the Jewish state; and it was in this latter role that Caiaphas headed the Sanhedrin and exercised judgment on Christ.⁹ **Thus for the Jewish people in Roman times, the High Priest was both the spiritual and secular leader of his people.** Unfortunately, as the Epistle to the Hebrews phrases the situation, many High Priests (certainly including Caiaphas) were “weak”; and only Christ is the High Priest who is “perfect forever” (Hebrews 7:28), “a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God” (Hebrews 2:17). Although Christ was a member of the Jewish tribe of Judah, not Levi, and His high priesthood is traced back to Melchizedek, not Aaron (Hebrews 5:6-10), **it was the religious role of the High Priest in the Temple that provided a model of reconciliation, mediation and holiness that was assumed by Christ.**¹⁰

⁹ “High Priest,” F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone (Eds.), *Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), p. 768. “In the time of the Herods and the Roman occupation the high priests were usually taken from the most influential families; they seem to have adopted a worldly attitude, believing neither in an immortal soul nor in a future life, and, according to the Talmud, they lived in luxury and self-indulgence.” The impressive tomb of Caiaphas has recently been discovered in Jerusalem.

¹⁰ For further development of the role of the High Priest as a precursor of Christ, see Alfred Eidershem, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ* (New York: Pott, 1884/ Forgotten Books, free at: www.forgottenbooks.org). Eidershem notes that the Temple priesthood “vanished, not leaving behind it in the synagogue even a single trace of its complicated and perfect arrangements;” and he quotes from Hebrews 3 and 5 that “the substance is of Christ,” and “He abideth a High-Priest for ever” p. 78. As a Jewish Christian, Eidershem’s perspective is that: “On one point especially I would wish to be quite explicit. At the close of these studies [of the Temple] I would say, with humble and heartfelt thankfulness, that step by step my Christian faith has only been strengthened by them, that, as I proceeded, the conviction has always been deepened that Christ is indeed ‘the end of the Law for righteousness,’ to Whom all the ordinances of the Old Testament had pointed and in Whom alone, alike the people and the history of Israel find their meaning...From first to last, the two dispensations are substantially one;

By transforming the role of the High Priest in the Temple, as well as the meaning of sacrifice, Jesus Christ established a form of priesthood as a model of righteousness that moved beyond the Temple into the lives of the Apostles and later the bishops as successors to the Apostles.

Furthermore, beginning with the Tent of Meeting (Numbers 3:6-9) and continuing to the time of Jesus, Levites served as assistants to the Jewish priests, to such an extent that “the early Christian Church frequently compared the function of deacons to the ministry of the post-exilic Levites.”¹¹ Origen of Alexandria (c. 185-c.254) recognised this link between the Levites and the deacons and priests of the early Christian Church by exclaiming:

When you see priests and Levites no longer handling the blood of rams and bulls, but ministering the word of God by the grace of the Holy Spirit, then you can say that Jesus has taken the place of Moses.¹²

Nearly a century later, again in Alexandria, St Athanasius the Great (c. 296-373) preached to the baptised about the Great Entrance to the Divine Liturgy: “You will see the Levites [namely, the deacons] bearing the breads and a chalice of wine, placing them on the table.”¹³ It is clear that the Jewish tradition of service, especially in a liturgical context, greatly influenced the later decision of the apostles to select deacons.

Jehovah, the God of Israel, is also the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” pp.xi-xii. Eidershem also notes that within the Jewish governing council, the Sanhedrin, there were supporters of Jesus such as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, as well as a cautious Gamaliel and that Acts 6.7 sets out how, because of the evangelism of the newly appointed deacons, “a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the [Christian] faith” p. 58. In a commentary written more than a hundred and twenty years later, Jaroslav Pelikan concurs that the Revised Standard Bible supports such an interpretation [as does the New International Version] and “this would be a rare case of a laudatory reference to ‘a great many of the priests, for in the writings of Luke, as in the other books of the New Testament, Jewish ‘priests’ and ‘chief priests’ receive a bad press, as the parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates (Luke 10:31)” p. 96. Cf. note 25 below.

¹¹ Dr Father Deacon John Chryssavgis, *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia: The Diaconate Yesterday and Today* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2009), p. 32.

¹² *Homily II on Joshua 6*, quoted by Chryssavgis, p.33.

¹³ *On Easter 8, PG 86:2400*, quoted by Chryssavgis, p. 33.

Despite the prominence of the Temple in Jerusalem, it was the synagogue that was the meeting place of Jews for regular worship throughout the Roman occupation of Palestine and the founding of the Christian Church.¹⁴ The precise origins of the threefold ordained Christian ministry continue to be debated among theologians, but “the dominant English consensus” is now that “the early Christian Church derived its pattern and order of ministry from the Jewish synagogue.”¹⁵ Within synagogues, it was the rabbi who generally assumed the primary position of eldership by virtue of his knowledge of the Torah; and he would generally be addressed by his followers as rabbi, meaning “My Master,” or literally, “great one.”¹⁶ Not surprisingly, in the Gospel of St John, the Jewish followers of Jesus often called him rabbi (John 1:38; 1:49; 3:2; 6:25) and expected leadership from him (as well as from his fellow “rabbi,” St John the Baptist, John 3:26) on how they should live their lives.

In the midst of scholarly debate and some ambiguity about both Jewish and Christian worship in first century Palestine, it is still clear that the sacrificial worship in the Temple and the scholarship within the synagogue had a profound impact on the formation of Christian ministry. In an important sense, Jesus Himself served as High Priest for his followers, both as their spiritual leader and eventually as a sacrifice over which the High Priest Caiaphas presided. The tradition of service and scholarship anchored in the liturgical life of the synagogue also provided an initial model for the early Jewish Christians as to how those who trusted God should behave—a foundation on which Rabbi Yeshua (i.e. Jesus Christ) could build.

Later, the ministry of the bishop—presiding at the liturgy and exercising scholarship and wisdom as a leader in the congregation—emerged rather as an alloy forged from a mixture of the earlier experience with the Jewish High Priest

¹⁴ Hugh S. Pyper, “The Temple,” in Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason & Hugh Pyper (Eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 697.

¹⁵ Chryssavgis, p. 30. See also Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (London: SPCK, 2002), pp. 192-193.

¹⁶ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbi> and *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

in the Temple and the chief elder (i.e. the rabbi) in the synagogue. In an important sense, by combining the roles of High Priest and Rabbi, the bishop transcended both the sacrificial emphasis of the Temple and the bookish scholarship of the synagogue. This transformation was made possible by the ministry of Christ Himself who had combined the roles of High Priest and Rabbi in such a manner that the early Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, received a deep understanding of the meaning of human life and of the possibility of drawing nearer to God.

II. The Threefold Ministry in the Apostolic Church

The Greek verb *apostellō* meaning “sent forth” was used in the New Testament to indicate the idea of sending an envoy on a mission; and the translators of the Septuagint used this word some seven hundred times “as the equivalent of a particular Hebrew verb [שלח, shalach] that also expresses divine authorisation to accomplish some well-defined and specific task [in the context of] to fix our attention on God as the one who gives his envoy authority.”¹⁷ Although “there was no clear definition or delimitation of apostles to begin with,” it is clear that “Jesus chose from among his disciples a group called ‘the Twelve’ (reflecting the twelve tribes of Israel) to share his authority and continue his mission.”¹⁸ However, “the role and identity of the Twelve was never transformed into institutional roles or offices [because] ... the ministry of the Twelve in the early church focused on prayer and the teaching of the Word, not on organization or administration”¹⁹

In a strict sense, the Twelve “had no successors,” yet as St Irenaeus insisted a century later “the church was apostolic because it held to the teaching of the apostles as guaranteed by a succession of ministers.”²⁰ In the New Testament, the

¹⁷ Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Basingstoke, Hants: Marshall Pickering, 1988), p. 59.

¹⁸ Adrian Hastings, “apostolicity,” in Hastings, Mason & Pyper, p. 32

¹⁹ Richards, pp. 59-60.

²⁰ Hastings, p. 33.

most common word used for “ministry” is *diakonia*, which literally means “service,”²¹ indicating “that all ministry is essentially diaconal—that is to say, a ministry of service in Christ the Servant.”²² **As the Apostolic Church grew, the three major orders of Christian priesthood were initially not heavily differentiated, but slowly became defined in the context of *diakonos* (deacon), *presbyteros* (priest) and *episkopos* (bishop).**²³

The sharpest initial differentiation among ministries was in the context of the seven Hellenistic deacons, who according to St. Luke in Acts 6:5 were appointed “in order to wait on tables” and to ensure that the Twelve did not “neglect the word of God.” However, Father John McGuckin points out that

Luke, in his account of conflicts in the Jerusalem church between Hellenists and Hebrew Christians, gave his own (massively simplified) version of early institutional ministerial development, which was to be determinative of conflicting origins of early institutional leadership structures by subordinating the diaconal order to the apostolic order in his tale of how the apostles instituted the diaconal office, so as to serve as distributors of dole while they [i. e. the apostles] preached the word (Acts 6:1-6). Luke’s account became commonly accepted as the Hellenist movement was absorbed into early catholic Christianity by the end of the first century, and deacons spread in the churches as officers who were chiefly concerned with the administration of practical charity.²⁴

In essence, St Luke was protecting the pre-eminence of the Jewish apostles over the Greek Gentiles in the early Church; and his determination to protect the role

²¹ Paul Avis, “ministry,” in Hastings, Mason & Pyper, p. 438.

²² Chryssavgis, p. 4.

²³ Cf. John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), entries on “Priesthood,” pp. 282-284, “Deacons,” pp. 96-97 and “Episcopate,” pp. 120-122.

²⁴ McGuckin, “Deacons,” p. 96.

of the Twelve against the Seven was very successful, although he was unaware of the long-term consequences to ministry that his perspective established.

St Luke's strong affirmation of the Apostles should be linked to the fact that **the Seven were themselves highly respected in the early Church and "included among their number powerful theologians such as Stephen and Philip"**²⁵ (See Acts 6:8 and Acts 7 on the work of Stephen; and Acts 8 on the work of Philip the Evangelist). In *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia: The Diaconate Yesterday and Today*, Father Deacon Dr John Chryssavgis, who has been a permanent deacon for some thirty years, notes:

The diaconal ministry could offer new impulse to the community today as it did in the early church; soon after the ministry of the diaconate

²⁵ McGuckin, "Deacons," p. 96. For a short biography of St Stephen, the Patron Saint of Deacons, see Chryssavgis, pp. 140-142. On St Philip, see Cross & Livingstone, p. 1277. There is some dispute about whether the Seven appointed in Acts 6 were the first deacons. Writing in 1966, Henry Chadwick states that "St Luke's account of the Seven in Acts vi is probably intended to recount the origin of the diaconate" (*The Early Church* [London: Penguin, 1967], p. 48. Writing in 1999, David Melling notes that "The seven are not referred to as *diakonoi*, but are traditionally venerated as the first deacons [however] John Chrysostom in his Fourteenth Homily on Acts rejects this view (Ken Parry, David J. Melling, Dimitri Brady, Sidney H. Griffith & John F. Healey [Eds.], *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2001]), p. 157. Writing in 2004, McGuckin implies acceptance of the traditional view that Acts 6 established the first deacons, as set out in the passage quoted above. Writing in 2006, Jaroslav Pelikan notes that "the selection of these seven deacons [set out in Acts 6] ... has long been interpreted as the institution of the traditional threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon," based on the writings of Irenaeus and Eusebius. Pelikan's primary concern is with church order and the role of the episcopate, but he does cite one Roman Catholic scholar reflecting that "this terminology appears to fluctuate a bit" (Pelikan, *Acts* [London: SCM Press, 2006]), pp. 91-93. Pelikan's key reflection is that "Anyone coming to the reading of Acts [6] from a knowledge of the Septuagint would recognize in this rite [of laying-on of hands] a continuation of the ordination of the Levites, in which 'the sons of Israel shall lay their hands ... upon the Levites' (Numbers 8:10 LXX), and in particular of the ordination of Joshua to stand in unbroken continuity with the ministry of Moses: 'And Joshua the son Naue [i.e. Nun] was filled with the knowledge, for Moses had laid his hands upon him' (Deuteronomy 34:9 LXX)," pp. 94-95. Whatever terminology is used, it is clear that the Seven were being affirmed by the early Christian community and given specific responsibilities to perform. Pelikan supports McGuckin's view of Luke's bias against the Seven (Greeks) by noting that "Stephen is listed among [the Seven] as 'only' a deacon, who is charged with 'serving tables,' so that the apostles can 'devote [them]selves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' But in the following chapter (Acts 7:1-53) he proceeds to deliver one of the most rhetorically powerful and scripturally learned exercises of 'the ministry of the word' in the whole of Acts, and well beyond." p. 93. Commenting on St John Chrysostom's refusal to refer to the Seven as "deacons," Deacon John Chryssavgis notes that "no distinct ecclesiastical orders were in existence at the time of the apostles. There were indeed no 'ordained' deacons; but neither were there consecrated bishops or presbyters..." p.87.

was established, we learn that ‘the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and a great many [priests] were obedient to the faith’ (Acts 6:7). This was because deacons were personally involved in the ministry of baptism and actively engaged in the ministry of preaching (see also Acts 6:8-7:60 and 8:4-40)....²⁶

Clearly, the Seven deserved the praise of St Timothy: “For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and a great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 3:13).

As referenced in note 25 (above), the differentiation between apostles and deacons in the early Church was open to different interpretations. In a similar manner, the evolving differentiation between presbyters, priests and the bishops who formed the episcopate is even more problematic (cf. Acts 11:30; 14:23; Philippians 1:1; 1 Peter 2:25; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17; Titus 1:5-9). **Initially, it seems clear that the *episcopoi* and *presbyteroi* were “not two distinct functions but two names for the ‘elders’ who presided over a Christian community in any place where it had come into stable existence.** This early local leadership of the church appears to have been a group one.”²⁷ Hastings notes:

However, quite soon a pattern of ministry was stabilised in which a single ‘bishop’ (*episcopus*) was assisted by a group of ‘presbyters’, as well as by another group of deacons who already had a distinct identity within the New Testament. It was for the bishop to preside at the celebration of the Eucharist and it was probably that presidency which underlay his primacy within the ministry.²⁸

²⁶ Chrysavgis, pp. 6-7. In a foreword, John (Zizioulas), Metropolitan of Pergamon writes: “To my knowledge, no other such study exists on the subject by an Orthodox scholar.”

²⁷ Adrian Hastings, “episcopate” in Hastings, Mason & Pyper, pp. 203-204.

²⁸ Hastings, “episcopate,” p. 204.

The term *episcopus* means overseer, in the context of one who has oversight of a Christian community; and “the Saxon term ‘bishop’ became its standard translation.”²⁹ McGuckin agrees with Hastings that:

The very earliest structures of the Christian ministerial offices are shrouded in obscurity, but by the second century there emerged a triadic form of *episkopos*-bishop, *presbyteros*-elder (which was rendered by the Old English ‘Priest’), and *diakonos*-deacon. This more and more replaced a range of other offices that had characterized the earliest church (such as apostolic missionaries, wandering prophets, exorcists, and *didaskaloi*-teachers) and became established by the end of the second century as a common pattern in most Christian communities.³⁰

Although in the context of leadership it is appropriate to see the bishops as successors to the Apostles, Hastings notes that “it appears mistaken to claim any straight *historical* link between the function of apostles and that of bishops. Between the two there is, at least in most places, a time gap. Moreover, the role of the former as witnesses of the Resurrection was not transferable.”³¹

III. The Threefold Ministry in the Pre-Constantine Church

The central problem that confronted any minister in the pre-Constantine Church was full-scale persecution—a reality that was systemic to Christianity operating as an independent entity in the midst of the Roman Empire. Father George Nicozisin has pointed out that:

The Christians were in a difficult position. They were no longer Jews, no longer Gentiles and no longer pagans. In the beginning, the Roman Government regarded them as an off-shoot Jewish sect. Since the Roman Emperor was considered to be divine, it was expected that all people of the nationals under the Roman imperial throne express a form of worship

²⁹ McGuckin, “Episcopate,” p. 120.

³⁰ McGuckin, “Episcopate,” p. 120.

³¹ Hastings, “episcopate,” p. 204. Italics added.

to him. When the Christians did not comply, they were accused of being a threat to the State. Eventually, a full-scale persecution set in which began about 64 A.D. and lasted some 250 years.³²

Although martyrdom was often the culmination of the Christian life for both ministers and their congregations, the one benefit of such sustained persecution was that Christians were forced “to scatter and take with them their zeal and missionary spirit;” and as they “preached and lived their faith” they drew their new neighbours to Christ.³³

The challenge of persecution and the reality of mobility led to the rise of many outstanding ministerial leaders, some now well-known and some who will remain forever unknown. As both the Jews and Christians sought solace from Roman persecution, the leadership of their communities shifted with the four cities of Jerusalem, Rome, Alexandria and Antioch becoming key locations for the Apostolic Fathers, such as St Clement of Rome (fl. 96), St Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-107), and later St Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 135-200). Each of these bishops made significant contributions to the theology of ministry.

Writing about 96 AD on proper order within the Christian ministry in Corinth, **St Clement, Bishop of Rome**, pointed out the relevance of Jewish worship in which the high priest has been given his own proper services, and the priests have been assigned their own place, and Levites their own ministrations, “for the Scripture says in one place: ‘I will establish their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith.’”³⁴ St Irenaeus later used Clement’s epistle to support his strong argument that in Corinth “the tradition ... had lately [been] received from the apostles” and its earlier composition strongly supported “the apostolic tradition of the Church.”³⁵

³² Nicozisin, *The Orthodox Church: A Well-Kept Secret—A Journey through Church History* (Minneapolis, MN: Light & Life, 1997), p. 24.

³³ Nicozisin, p. 24.

³⁴ Clement, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, XL.5, XLII.1. Quoted by J. Stevenson (Ed.), *A New Eusebius: Documents illustrating the history of the Church to AD 337* (London: SPCK, 1987), pp. 7-9. Stevenson notes that the quotation of Isa 60.17 “is not in accordance with any other version.” The New International Version has “And I will make peace your administrators and righteousness your overseers.” Cf. Chryssavgis, pp. 48-49.

³⁵ Irenaeus, III.3, 4. Quoted by Stevenson, p. 115.

Writing about 106-107 AD, **St Ignatius of Antioch**, fought to keep the Church in Orthodoxy. His advice would gladden the heart of any bishop: “Pay attention to the bishop so that God will pay attention to you.”³⁶ However, this was not servile subservience, but rather a strong attempt to maintain the unity of the Church grounded in the roles of different ministers:

I am devoted to those who are subject to the bishop, presbyters, and deacons; and may it turn out for me that I have a portion with them in God. Labour together with one another, strive together, run together, suffer together, rest together, rise up together—as God’s stewards and assistants and servants [cf. Titus 1:8; I Corinthians 3:9; 4:1; 1 Peter 4:10].³⁷

Evaluating the impact of the Letters of St Ignatius on the Pre-Constantine Church, Father Jack Sparks reflects:

In every letter he emphasizes the unity of the church and the role of the bishop as the center of that unity. He is most emphatic about the value and role of the Eucharist as the primary means of mediating the life of the risen Lord to the members of His body, the church. Union with Christ thus comes down to the very practical matters of the regular worship and the daily life of an ordered society.³⁸

Although St Ignatius urged firmly “where the shepherd is, follow there as sheep [cf. John 10:10-12]”, the saint also praised those who in their “orderliness in God ...live in accordance with the truth [cf. John 8:32, 33] and who “do everything on the assumption that [God] dwells in us [cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16]”³⁹

³⁶ *The Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, To Polycarp*, Chapter 6. Trans. Robert M. Grant, in Sparks, p.118.

³⁷ *The Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, To Polycarp*, Chapter 6. Sparks, p. 118.

³⁸ “Introduction to *The Letters of St Ignatius of Antioch*, in Sparks, p. 74. The teachings of St Ignatius have been further developed by Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) in *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries*, as cited above in note 1. See also Chryssavgis, pp. 49-50.

³⁹ *The Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, To the Ephesians*, Chap. 6, Verse 2 and Chap. 15, Verse 3.

Writing in the latter half of the second century, **St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lugdunum (Lyon, France)**, the capital of Imperial Gaul and at the time of Marcus Aurelius the greatest city in Europe after Rome, stressed that “the Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: in one God,” the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰ It was this “tradition of the Apostles,” often referred to then and now as “apostolic succession,” that was “manifested in the entire world” and made it “possible for all, who wish to see the truth, to contemplate [that truth] clearly in every church.”⁴¹

St Irenaeus’ appreciation of apostolic succession through the bishops was grounded in his respect for Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (d. 155), who had been instructed by the Apostles and who had instructed St Irenaeus in the truth as a young man. Fighting against all heresies, St Irenaeus insisted that:

... we ought not to seek the truth among others [when] it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man depositing his money in the bank, delivered into her hands in the fullest measure the whole truth: so that every man, whosoever can draw from her the water of life. For she is the entrance of life; all others are thieves and robbers. On this account we are bound to avoid them, but to make choice of the things pertaining to the Church with the utmost diligence, and to lay hold of the tradition of the truth.⁴²

All three bishops traced their authority, their theology and their worship back to the Apostles, determined to preserve the integrity and unity of the Church.

What these bishops and others were doing in the Pre-Constantine Church was moulding the ministry. Somewhat like the potter who shapes many vessels and keeps only a few to fire in the kiln, so numerous experiments in ministry during this period were discarded and will never be known. Although these

⁴⁰ Irenaeus, I.2 Harvey, in Stevenson, p. 111. Cf. Chryssavgis, pp. 51-52.

⁴¹ Irenaeus, I.3.1 Harvey, in Stevenson, p. 114.

⁴² Irenaeus, III.4.1 Harvey in Stevenson, p. 116. See also Stevenson’s “Notes on Sources,” p. 378.

ministerial experiments were in a deep sense forged in the midst of persecution, perhaps even more important than persecution was the deep willingness of both ministers and their congregations to repent and start again in the eternal search to draw nearer to Christ. For both ministers and their flocks, the ancient homily by an unknown author, but ascribed to St Clement of Rome, calls us on:

... while we are on earth, let us repent. For we are clay in the hands of the craftsman. It is like a potter making a vessel: if it becomes misshapen or breaks in his hands, he moulds it again; but if he has already put it into the kiln, he can no longer repair it. So it is with us [cf. Jeremiah 18: 4-6; Romans 9:12-21]. While we are in this world, let us repent with all our hearts of the evil we have done in the flesh in order that we may be saved by the Lord while we still have the opportunity to repent. For after we have passed out of this world we shall no longer be able in the next either to confess or to repent [cf. Luke 16:19-31]. So, brethren, if we do the will of the Father and keep the flesh pure and keep the commandments of the Lord, we shall receive eternal life....⁴³

Then, as now, “our sight [is] restored by his will...”⁴⁴

IV. The Threefold Ministry in the Time of Constantine and After

The increasing use of Church Councils from the fourth century onwards at which bishops gathered together to reach doctrinal consensus and prevent the spread of heresy limited the episcopal power of an individual bishop. Moreover, the bishop’s local ministry was “reshaped by the development of parishes within a single diocese,” so that the presbyter became “for most Christians, their regular pastor and Eucharistic celebrant, the bishop became a pastor of pastors.”⁴⁵ Just as the role of the bishop changed in this period, so the role of the diaconate also

⁴³ II Clement, Chapter 8, verses 1-4. Trans. Holt H. Graham and Robert M. Grant in Jack N. Sparks (Ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers* (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life, 1978), pp. 63-64.

⁴⁴ II Clement, Chapter 1, verse 6.

⁴⁵ Hastings, “episcopate,” in Hastings, Mason & Pypers, p. 204.

changed, becoming “primarily an office of charity or welfare, distinctly defined by the distribution of provisions to the needy and alms to the poor.”⁴⁶ This social welfare role for the deaconate was linked to the fact that “by the middle of the fifth century, and especially by the middle of the sixth century, Byzantium had become a carefully supervised welfare state,” with the deacon also assuming the role of an *oikonomos* or financial steward within many Church organisations.⁴⁷

During the reign of Constantine, the bishop became a powerful political figure, encouraged by Constantine to administer local justice to Christians; and this tendency increased further by the time of St Augustine. Bishop of Hippo (353-430). “After the fourth century the Christian emperors increasingly honoured the episcopate, and a tension can be noticed between its original conception as an office of liturgical president and teacher and its new functions as magistrate and administrator for a large diocesan area.”⁴⁸ Meanwhile, after the time of Justinian (482-565), in the great cities a Pentarchy of Patriarchates grew up with Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem enjoying considerable respect. For practical reasons, the Orthodox Church then required bishops to be celibate and this “permanently monasticised the episcopate;” however, in the West the episcopacy became further secularised so that by the Middle Ages “bishops were typically members of the ruling class, holders of a great deal of land, living in castles or palaces,” leading to a situation in which “while the priesthood still looked more or less like a New Testament ministry ... the episcopate did not.”⁴⁹

In an important sense, monasticism and its inherent asceticism saved the Eastern bishops from the influence of much of the secularisation that was beginning in the cities. By 300, “in the Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus alone there

⁴⁶ Chryssavgis, p. 87.

⁴⁷ Chryssavgis, p. 88. “The Council of Trullo (692) undermined the liturgical identity of deacons, choosing to underline the function of the deaconate as a ‘pattern of philanthropy and social concern’ (Canon 16). This demarcation between liturgy and philanthropy in determining the function of the deaconate later became the normative canonical thinking in Byzantium, maintained by Byzantine scholars in the Orthodox Church to this day.”

⁴⁸ McGuckin, “Episcopate,” pp. 121-122.

⁴⁹ Hastings, “episcopate,” in Hastings, Mason & Pyper, p. 204.

were said to be ten thousand monks and twenty thousand nuns. The desert, they said, had become a city because of the number of the monks living there.”⁵⁰ Although these men and women had been attracted by “the radical simplicity of [the monastic] response to God,”⁵¹ emperors, kings, bishops and other prominent leaders saw these monks as potential bishops so that monks came to exercise a near monopoly on the episcopate.

The response of many worldly men who still desired to appoint bishops of spiritual depth was understandable, but the challenge to monks who were appointed to become bishops was considerable. For example, consider the case of Abba Apphy:

They used to say of a bishop of Oxyrynchus, named Abba Apphy, that when he was a monk he submitted himself to a very severe way of life. When he became a bishop he wished to practise the same austerity, even in the world, but he had not the strength to do so. Therefore he prostrated himself before God saying, ‘Has your grace left me because of my episcopate?’ Then he was given this revelation, ‘No, but when you were in solitude and there was no one else it was God who was your helper. Now that you are in the world, it is man.’⁵²

It was men such as Abba Apphy who saved the Byzantine episcopate from dissolving into a role of primarily administration and political influence. Perhaps even as bishops they were able to retain a significant degree of monastic simplicity, following in the footsteps of Abba Andrew who said, “These three things are appropriate for a monk: exile, poverty, and endurance in silence.”⁵³ Bishops in the Constantine and Post-Constantine Church were confronted with roles of considerable complexity, and men such as St Basil and St Augustine, among many others, met these challenges with commendable integrity.

⁵⁰ Benedicta Ward, “Introduction,” *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. xx.

⁵¹ Ward, p. xx.

⁵² Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, Rev. Ed. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), pp. 35-36.

⁵³ Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, p. 37.

V. The Contemporary Diocesan Model: Its Strengths and Weaknesses

Today the ministry of bishops, priests and deacons is exercised primarily within an individual diocese. The question arises: **How is the threefold ministry now being exercised and what changes, if any, might be appropriate? A preliminary response to this question needs to consider three significant issues: (1) the size of a worshipping congregation; (2) leadership in the Church; and (3) the necessity of prayer.**

The early Church viewed the synagogue as its primary area for recruitment, especially after the fall of the Second Temple in 70 AD, when Jews were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. However, although new Christians were later recruited from both synagogues and gatherings of Gentiles, **it was in individual homes that the early Christians gathered to worship.** This had certain advantages—that “each person was expected to contribute and to serve others with his or her spiritual gift(s). Each would also be served by the concern of the community and spurred on to personal growth and commitment;” however, there was also the significant disadvantage that “the smaller groups could become factions—splinter groups, seeking separate identity by following some leader or by emphasizing a particular doctrine (1 Corinthians 1:10-17; Colossians 2:16-19)”⁵⁴ **The challenge today is to regain sufficient intimacy that each Christian grows in their commitment to Christ, yet a suitable size that the individual congregation is still part of the universal Church. This problem is particularly acute in the Orthodox Church in the West where local congregations are often gathered from a wide geographical area, so that members of such congregations have little day to day contact with each other except on Sundays or Church festivals.**

That is precisely the challenge that confronts the threefold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon in its attempt to lead the Church—to empower all the members of the local congregation to grow in their love of Christ and of each other, and to grow in their ability to serve both Christ and each other in a widely

⁵⁴ Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Marshall Pickering/ Zondervan, 1985), “Church,” p. 167.

dispersed geographical area where lay Christians spend the bulk of their time working in secular occupations. For many lay Christians today, the diocese is an unknown entity and the bishop a venerable figure and a focus of unity in Christ, but not someone who greatly impinges on their daily Christian lives. This is not to minimize the significant liturgical role of the bishop and the priest as his representative in celebrating the sacraments and ensuring the continuity of the Church. However, even though bishops, priests and deacons are genuinely respected and appreciated, their impact as spiritual leaders and pastors in the lives of their dispersed flocks is often negligible in the midst of an overwhelmingly secular society and more especially when these ministers have to engage in secular occupations to support themselves. This raises huge issues about Christian giving, of course!

Another problematic aspect is that bishops, priests, and at times even deacons, are often imposed on local congregations without genuine local approval or involvement in the process of election.

Perhaps there is wisdom in these words:

Whatever we may call our local church leaders and whatever form of government our tradition may involve, harmony with Scripture suggests that (1) there should be a team (2) drawn from the local congregation (3) that functions to guard the processes that make for a healthy, spiritually growing local expression of the body of Christ.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, the Orthodox Church does need to develop an innovative pattern of leadership that is Biblical, patristically-oriented and contemporary.

Because of these problems, some sincere Orthodox Christians find that the parish is marginal to their lives, providing little spiritual nourishment, and this without blame being attached to the clergy, most of whom want something better.

⁵⁵ Richards, "Elders," p. 245.

This is a structural problem that needs to be tackled jurisdiction by jurisdiction, diocese by diocese, and parish by parish.

In the face of such immense challenges, the only proper immediate response is sustained prayer and visionary, creative thinking about ministerial deployment. No reliance on new forms of Church government or itinerant charismatic preachers or even an understanding of how earlier forms of Church government worked in different cultures is a sufficient response. We need to learn to pray about these matters; and God will show us the way.

APPENDIX

To Be or Not to Be Celibate? It's Your Decision as a Christian

Throughout most of the history of the Orthodox Church, its bishops have been required to be celibate. This insistence upon sexual chastity has emerged in response to St Paul's "opinion" that as individuals chose to become Christians, he "thinks" that "in view of the present distress" (presumably the secular influences of life in a pagan society) "it is good for a man to remain as he is"—that is, single or married when he has decided to follow Christ (1 Corinthians 7:25-26). Intriguingly, St Paul makes it clear that "I have no command of the Lord" (v. 25), and that though he wishes "all men were even as myself am" (v. 7), following him in his own personal choice to live a life of celibacy, "each man has his own gift from God" (v. 7) which may or may not include living a celibate life. The Orthodox Church has applied St Paul's rejection of sexual intercourse solely to bishops and monks/nuns, but not to others.

It is of interest that in the same seventh chapter of First Corinthians in which St Paul expresses his personal preference for celibacy and his hope that other men and women will follow in his footsteps, he is much firmer in his advice to those who are married when they come to Christ: "But to the married I **give instructions, not I, but the Lord**, that the wife should not leave her husband ...and that the husband should not divorce his wife" (v. 10-11). With reference to those who come to Christ and have a marriage partner who is not willing to make such a significant decision, St Paul is even more hesitant, as well as detailed, in his advice on sexual intercourse than for those who have themselves come to the Lord:

But to the rest [that is, those who are married but have spouses who do not accept Christ at the same time as [their spouses] have made that decision], I say, **not the Lord**, that if any brother has wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And a women [who has come to Christ but] who has an unbelieving husband and he consents to live with her, he must not divorce her" (v. 12-13).

Clearly, St Paul's highly nuanced attitude to sexual intercourse has been developed with much prayer and reflection and a deep awareness that **how a Christian lives his or her sexual life is not a self-evident matter on which Jesus Christ himself has given explicit instructions to every person who chooses to follow Him.**

In the three situations that St Paul considers, it is noteworthy that he is most firm in his instructions to those married couples when both man and woman accept Christ ("I give instructions, not I, but the Lord"), most hesitant when only one spouse accepts Christ ("I say, not the Lord"), and moderate in his view ("I have no command of the Lord") as to how a particular Christian should choose to be married or single. His rather cautious view is not surprising, given that St Peter, with his famous healed mother-in-law, was either previously or presently married, with Matthew (8:14-17), Mark (1:29-34) and Luke (4:38-41) all having affirmed that healing and Peter's present or previous relationship of marriage.

The choice of whether to follow the lifestyle of St Peter or St Paul is not as straight forward as might at first appear. For example, when St Paul advises that "one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife" (1 Corinthians 7:33), he is not envisaging a wife who is more concerned about the spirituality of her husband than his worldly attributes or sexual prowess. Similarly, it is not always true that "one who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord" (I Corinthians 7:32), because such an unmarried person may well become a stronger Christian if he or she is supported by a loving spouse. **St Paul's overriding objective, as set out in the seventh chapter of First Corinthians, is "to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord" (v. 35).**

In relation to celibacy, what Christians should seek whether or not they are ordained is a spiritual harvest—precisely what Jesus Christ sought to achieve from his encounter with the highly-sexed Samaritan woman at the well—the one who had lived with five men, and who when Christ said to her, "Go, call your husband," immediately admitted that she had "no husband" (John 4:16-17). Because of that highly intimate exchange about sexual intercourse, the Samaritan

woman recognised that Christ was “a prophet;” and she went back into the city and “said to the men: “Come see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ [the Messiah] is it?” (John 4:19; 4:28-30). And the Samaritan men were deeply interested. Here was a stranger who knew all about the loose moral values of one of their women, a woman who clearly enjoyed good sex and made sure that her man appreciated her. Yet what is striking is not the morality of the Samaritan woman but that at the beginning of Christ’s public ministry she was closer to recognizing the Messiah than were the disciples.

The point that St John makes in the fourth chapter of his Gospel is not only about avoiding judgment on the sexuality of others, but also about the teaching of Jesus on the timing of a spiritual harvest, that what matters in life is not one’s previous sexual experience but one’s present attitude to the Messiah. St John concludes his comments about the Samaritan woman by saying: “Jesus said to them [the disciples], ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work’ (4:34-38). That is a deeply Biblical understanding of both sexuality and the decision to accept Jesus Christ into one’s life. **Thus the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman encapsulates what St Paul is trying to teach us: Seek the will of God the Father and use your sexuality in such a manner that you accomplish the work of God the Father, with His timing, whatever the season or situation may be.**

So how has the Orthodox Church done over the centuries in advising us how to live out a viable relationship between sexuality and a life in Christ? **What is the role of celibacy in this nuanced relationship between sexuality and a life committed to Christ?** There was no one approach to celibacy in the early Church, but “even though **the adoption of celibacy was recognized to be a deeply personal and spiritual choice**, it soon became the subject of church legislation,” when in 325, Constantine summoned the first of the ecumenical councils, the First Council of Nicea which rejected the demand to require celibacy of all the clergy.⁵⁶ **What**

⁵⁶ McGuckin, “Celibacy,” p.57. Emphasis added.

the Orthodox Church has sought to achieve is a remarkable affirmation of the lifestyles of both St Peter and St Paul, of both marriage and celibacy.

The central teaching of the Orthodox Church about sexuality and the nature of one's commitment to Christ is that each man should make the decision about whether to marry or to remain celibate *before* he is ordained, just as each woman should make the decision about whether to join a convent *before* she is married. If a partner dies after that decision has been made, then a different situation arises, except for a bishop whose initial decision is viewed as permanent for the remainder of his life.⁵⁷ **However, once that initial decision has been made, the Orthodox Church has developed an unusual affirmation of celibacy within the exercise of marriage.** The present Orthodox guidelines are similar in the Antiochian, Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian, Russian, Serbian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches and generally throughout the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Married couples are asked to abstain not only from meat, eggs, dairy products, fish and alcoholic drink each Wednesday and Friday, but also from sexual intercourse. That same insistence on sexual abstinence also applies from midnight of the evening before the reception of Holy Communion, as well as throughout the whole of Lent, Advent, the Apostles' Fast and the Dormition Fast. Thus married couples are asked to set aside approximately half of each year for fasting and sexual abstinence. **In essence, those who are married are invited to enjoy sexual intercourse for half a year and observe sexual abstinence for the other half of the year.**

Orthodox couples are rightly reticent to discuss their sexual practices within their marriages. Therefore, it is difficult to know to what extent these guidelines on sexual abstinence are observed. Perhaps such guidelines are at times an ideal to be achieved rather than a reality that is already being experienced. When asked for advice, priests consistently suggest that decisions about the degree of sexual abstinence are decisions for the couple to make together, without hierarchical

⁵⁷ Present Orthodox guidelines also suggest that neither deacons nor priests should marry again if their wives die, but Father John Chryssavgis suggests: "The canonical tradition with regard to remarriage of deacons and presbyters deserves greater attention." p. 176, note 23.

demands. Such advice is appropriate, because as Father John Meyendorff has pointed out: “It has never been the Church’s practice to give moral guidance by issuing standard formulas claiming universal validity on questions which actually require a personal act of conscience.”⁵⁸

The challenge then that every Orthodox couple and every Orthodox single person face in making their own “personal act[s] of conscience” is how to achieve a balance between their desire to express their sexuality and their awareness that sexual abstinence is also a legitimate and at times necessary goal in the Christian life. Experience suggests that this contemporary Orthodox perspective, perhaps not what either St Paul or St Peter envisaged in their own lives, actually works quite well. Precisely because one recognises the importance of living a life of sexual abstinence for half the year, the other half of the year when sexual intercourse is encouraged becomes even more attractive. On the other hand, precisely because sexual intercourse becomes so attractive to a couple, the reality of sexual abstinence reigns in any tendency to become addicted to sex or to give sexual intercourse too high a priority in one’s life. In essence, whether married or single, a bishop, a priest, a deacon or a lay person, we are all challenged as Christians to reflect deeply on the purposes and meaning of celibacy and to each make a personal decision about how to balance commitment to Christ and sexuality in our lives so that we each achieve the spiritual harvest that God intends for each of us. Moreover, it should be noted that sexuality and commitment to Christ are not necessarily in conflict, because just as the body and the soul are united, so sexuality and commitment to Christ are also united.

What the Orthodox Church has achieved with this approach to celibacy is considerable. Writing in a general context about the integration of knowing and loving, the Quaker, Parker J. Palmer, has pointed out that the love we seek “is not a soft and sentimental virtue, not a fuzzy feeling of romance. The love of which spiritual tradition speaks is ‘tough love,’ the connective tissue of reality—and

⁵⁸ Meyendorff, *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 1984), p. 62.

we flee from it because we fear its claims on our lives.”⁵⁹ Yet if we make the choice to flee from this “tough love” which seeks to balance sexual intercourse and sexual abstinence, we are liable to become entangled in a confused understanding of sexuality which affirms neither sexual intercourse nor sexual abstinence. In the midst of just such a danger, beginning with the Council of Trullo in 691 and 692, the Orthodox and Roman Catholic positions began to diverge, as the Orthodox Church sought to move away from its earlier attitude of “unrestrained mildness” in relation to clergy sexuality, without adopting the “harsh severity” of Rome.⁶⁰ Centuries later, when the Eastern and Western understandings of Christianity diverged further in 1054, the Orthodox again objected to the Latin “insistence on priestly celibacy [for all priests]”.⁶¹ Current Roman Catholic experience with both the tendency of *some* Roman Catholic priests to engage in sexual abuse of children, as well as the refusal of *many* deeply spiritual Roman Catholic laymen to consider the priesthood, suggests that it is **Orthodox rather than Roman Catholic guidelines that are truly viable after centuries of experience.**

Father John Chryssavgis concludes his study, *Love, Sexuality and the Sacrament of Marriage*, with the advice:

Life is a journey—a difficult and complex journey. And marriage is one way of travelling—indeed of enjoying and not simply enduring—this journey through sharing, Yet the goal of the journey lives ahead; the significance of the sacrament lies in the Kingdom. It is this Kingdom for which we truly hope and which is our true home.⁶²

Both those who rest happily in this affirmation of marriage and those who journey on the path of abstinence as their “way of travelling” can each reach the Kingdom which is the “true home” of all Christians.

⁵⁹ Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (New York: Harper One/Harper Collins, 1993), p. 9.

⁶⁰ Andrew Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church AD 681-1071* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 2007), p. 32.

⁶¹ Louth, p. 332.

⁶² Chryssavgis, *Love, Sexuality and the Sacrament of Marriage* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1996), p. 35.

It may well be that the decision for many of us about whether to live a life characterized by marriage or celibacy is not an either/or decision. On the contrary, the more committed we become to the joyous sexuality of marriage, the deeper is our awareness of the even greater need for celibacy. It may well be that as we become more secure in our personal decision about the extent to which we exercise our sexuality, the deeper is our awareness that **it is commitment to Christ rather than sexuality that is the central issue in how we choose to live our lives.** It is possible that the greatest possible affirmation of both sexuality and celibacy is to recognize the unity of body and soul, thereby confirming that sexuality and commitment to Christ can be sensibly linked. Only in that manner are both sexuality and life in Christ given their proper places in our wish to reach the Kingdom, whether we are single or married.⁶³ The silent, repressed confusion of the disciples at the well in Samaria who were afraid to ask Jesus, “‘What do You seek?’” or ‘Why do you speak to her?’” is not a way forward in the Christian life. **Whether single or married, we must all face ourselves.**

⁶³ For further consideration of Orthodox perspectives on how to balance sexuality and commitment to Christ see Philip Sherrard, *Christianity and Eros: Essays on the Theme of Sexual Love* (Limni, Evia, Greece: Denise Harvey, 1995), first published by SPCK, London in 1976; and the writings of the Greek Orthodox theologian Christos Yannaras, especially *Variations on the Song of Songs* (2005) and *Person and Eros* (2007), both published by Holy Cross Orthodox Press.