



Celibacy and the Jesus Fellowship

The Jesus Fellowship began in the early seventies following a move of the Holy Spirit amongst people attending Bugbrooke Baptist Chapel in Northamptonshire. Arising out of this new move was a community lifestyle for some and also a call to celibacy. Today around 250 men and women in the Jesus Fellowship nation-wide have made the choice to stay single for Jesus. They include single parents, divorced people, widows and widowers as well as single people of all ages and sexual orientations. Celibacy is commended by Paul (1 Cor. 7:25-40) and Jesus (Matthew 19:12).

FEEDBACK

We are always pleased to hear from any who read 'Undivided' and will always try to answer any questions directed to the Editor. Address correspondence to: The Editor, Undivided, Jesus Fellowship Central Offices, Nether Heyford, Northants NN7 3LB or email: huw@jesus.org.uk



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'... to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord' (1 Corinthians 7:35)

UNDIVIDED

JESUS FELLOWSHIP/
MODERN JESUS ARMY
CELIBACY
INSPIRATIONAL
NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE
EDITOR ...

The Celibate Spirit

Think of Jesus, for a moment, coming into our house or our church? How would He operate? How would He respond to what was there? What if He looked at the atmosphere? Came to your leaders meeting? Sat around with you? Considered your possessions and lifestyle? What would He say and do?

The spirit of celibacy is always sharp and focused. There were no distractions or blockages to stop Jesus accomplishing the Father's will. The celibate spirit of Jesus is a break-through spirit, ready to take out the whip of cords on what is settled, comfortable and cosy. It upsets people as well as tables!

The celibate spirit also gathers people together. It brings the kingdom of heaven on earth. It is not side-tracked or tied down. It is eternal. It is not into the trivial or the shallow, but into deep and eternal things.

There is a call today to be as radical as Jesus. To live like Jesus, to be undivided, to be celibate. This opposes the tide of the world. This spirit loves the kingdom of God above its highest joy and seeks always to bring the presence and life of Jesus into our houses and churches.

Huw Lewis

HAVE A LOOK!



The video, 'Why? Why Not?' Six men and women speak about what it means for them to have chosen to be celibate for God and the path that led them to make that decision

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Seven Silver Rings

The accounts of seven celibates from the Jesus Fellowship who tell their stories with passion, humour and courage

Hildegard of Bingen (1506 - 1552)

A single-hearted passion for souls

In recent years, the medieval nun, Hildegard of Bingen, has been the subject of renewed interest from historians, theologians and those wanting to learn about the deeper spiritual life. Fortunately for us, many of her written works have been preserved and these give us exciting insight into the thinking of someone who is regarded as one of the most influential and remarkable women of her time.

Hildegard was born in Bermersheim in Rheinhes-sen, Germany, in 1098. She was the tenth child of a noble family and her father was a soldier. As a child she was often ill but her frailty and tenuous hold on life drove her to search after God for herself and she found Him reveal Himself to her in many ways. At the age of eight she began to be trained and educated by a nun called Jutta who lived nearby in a Benedictine monastery in Disobodenberg. Others soon joined them and, at 15, Hildegard became a Benedictine nun.

Jutta died in 1136 and Hildegard, with her deep love for God and creative leadership ability, was elected the new leader of the community. In 1150 she left Disobodenberg to found a new community near Bingen. Fifteen years later, a daughter house was established nearby.

Hildegard's influence may have been forever confined to those around her but when she was about forty, she felt God tell her to dictate to someone what she had learned about Him and the quality of life He longs to bring - so others could benefit from her insight. (She could read but never learned to write.) She was reluctant at first but, when she did and her works began to be circulated, she found crowds of people, both rich and poor, flocking to her for advice and help. She became spiritual advisor to many of the leading religious and political figures of the day, corresponding with kings and queens, abbots and abbesses as well as lay people. She also travelled extensively, including visiting the Emperor Frederick whilst still continuing to lead her two communities.

Hildegard's energy and vision led her into many fields. Besides her spiritual writings, she also authored works on medicine and natural science and composed

music. She even invented a new language which was a mixture of Latin and German!

At the centre, and fuelling Hildegard's great industry and love of life, was her profound love for Jesus, which found expression in her celibate gifting. To her, Jesus has not come primarily come to take away the old life but to gift us with abundant, new life. For her, the celibate life is always meant to be vibrant and 'green', not life denying and 'grey'. In her writings she makes much of the subject of greenness, drawing her inspiration from the fresh and verdant life that is manifest in God's creation. To her, celibates are the jewel of God's glorious creation.

Hildegard wrote that celibacy has at its core a passionate love for Jesus and, through this love, celibates can experience life on a higher plain and not continually be dominated by natural pleasures and loves. Celibates need not dwindle but blossom and positively shine and radiate God's love and life as they are

acquainted and filled with the Holy Spirit. Hildegard wrote of celibate women: "By their purity of purpose, these women have overcome their vain, empty unpredictable desires. Through their passionate love for the true Son, they have ascended to that level beyond the confines of prescribed laws and now they breathe a new air, an air pure beyond the clarity of the purest water; and they shine with a radiance beyond the radiant glory of the sun. In the green life of their virginity and in the blossoming of body and spirit, these women have revealed their sweetest longings. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they have been filled with the fragrance and power of many virtues. And now they feel the breath of a new air, air that breathes the fresh green force of all the herbs and flowers of earth and paradise; air that is filled with the fragrance of life-giving power, just as the summer is filled with the perfume of green plants and flowers." Although suffering from ill health all her life, Hildegard lived to be eighty. She has been described as "one of the most remarkable woman of the Middle Ages." (The Penguin Dictionary of Saints, Donald Attwater.) The test of true greatness in spiritual writers is that their works stand the test of time and have something to say to every generation. This is certainly true of Hildegard of Bingen.

To her, celibates are the jewel of God's glorious creation



For Huw, the call to celibacy has released brotherhood love into the church

'if you are everything to me, I'll be everything for you'

Huw Lewis was born in London in 1954, not long after his family moved from Wales. He became a Christian in his teens but later found a deep experience of God whilst at Oxford University in the early 1970's. This happened when his girlfriend took him to Bugbrooke Chapel, at that time the central meeting place of the Jesus Fellowship. Huw described how he found it terrifying and yet very drawing. "I had a very powerful experience of the love of God in action. It was," he said, "as if I was hit by a 'mallet of love.' Something of God's kingdom impacted me and life was never the same again!"

After his course finished in the summer of 1977, Huw got a teaching post in Northampton and moved into 'New Creation Hall,' one of the first community houses belonging to the Jesus Fellowship. Beginning in the early seventies, the church had begun a radical pioneering, not only of 'Acts Two' style community, but celibacy as well.

"Nothing within me would have considered celibacy," said Huw, "but I just knew it was wrong to carry on this relationship with my girlfriend. We had been half-planning to get married but I sensed God say, 'You've got to finish this relationship.'"

"Have you ever thought of celibacy?" an old friend asked Huw out of the blue one day. "You love the brotherhood and could be more effective building the church if you were single."

"It was a bombshell," said

Huw. "I hadn't even considered it. I'd always wanted to be married but the comment triggered something off inside me. I didn't rush into it but pondered it and shared it with friends. Over the next year I began to feel a real calling to be celibate."

Life as a young teacher was exacting and often Huw would take a walk in the park near school at the end of the day. One late afternoon, as he did so, he began to sense the presence of God in a strong way and knew this was a significant moment. "It was a very powerful experience. I sensed God speaking very clearly, calling me to celibacy. 'If you are everything to Me, I will be everything to you.'"

"I've held onto that word," said Huw. "Celibacy was a plunge into being more prophetic but the key to my ministry as a celibate has been to build brotherhood and carry wisdom. I began to gather people around

me. I began to learn a lot about servant-heartedness, about real fathering, about leading in action not words, having big ears and accepting people. I discovered people don't change until you accept them and you can't correct until you forgive. It taught me to lay down my life for the flock."

"Celibacy", Huw said, "is about the preciousness of sacrifice. We were sacrificing our lives for the sake of the church."

"Celibacy had brought me a new release of love."

"The soul has as much capacity

to love as the sun has to shine ... the heart lies shrivelled and buried in the grave that cannot love' is one of Huw's favourite quotations from the writings of Thomas Traherne. "Locked-up love was beginning to be released. I was discovering that we have a deep store of love inside," he said. Celibacy helped this process.

"Celibacy adds something extra to your ministry, whether one is a prophet, an intercessor or a nurturer or an evangelist. I believe celibacy brings clarity of vision. We have pioneered a celibacy which is not legalistic or enforced but living, a new charismatic celibacy which is all part of being a revolutionary for Jesus."

Sexuality today is so blatantly worshipped, the centre of so many people's lives. Daring

radicals renounce what the world counts precious to get something far greater! A passion

to follow Jesus, to imitate Him is my desire. Jesus is my hero!"

Deep relationships are so important to me and that starts with God. Maintaining a love for God is everything.

"The celibate gift," concludes Huw, "is to be poured out like the alabaster jar. (Mark 14:3-9) It is a costly sacrifice which many would see as wasting your life. It's about being reckless! We don't want to play it safe! If we stop pioneering - we'll stop living! Let's keep exploring the promptings of God! If we don't we'll begin to die."

If we stop pioneering, we stop living