

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

# Undivided



FROM THE  
EDITOR ...

JESUS FELLOWSHIP/  
MODERN JESUS ARMY

**CELIBACY  
INSPIRATIONAL  
NEWSLETTER**

FEB 2008 NO.26

## "Sweet Friend of my soul"

I recently came across this quote from the 18th century hymn writer and preacher, Gerhard Tersteegen. It is said this covenant was written in his own blood in a moment of sacrificial consecration. He chose to live single for Jesus and realised that he couldn't exist any other way if he was to fulfil his calling in life. Especially important to him was the sense of the friendship of Jesus and this is crucial to every celibate's ministry.

For the celibate, times of special consecration or recommitment are valuable to keep the gift inspired and anointed.

"From this evening to all eternity, Your will, not mine, be done. Command and rule, and reign in me. I yield myself up without reserve and I promise with Your help and power, rather to give up the last drop of this my blood, than knowingly and willingly, in my heart or in my life, be untrue and disobedient to You. Behold Jesus, You have me wholly and completely, sweet Friend of my soul. You have the love of my heart for Yourself and none other. Your Spirit be my keeper, Your death the rock of my assurance; may Your Spirit seal that which is written in the simplicity of my heart... Those who 'have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven', may be truly called pure. They were not born so, nor was it the result of their natural disposition: grace and a noble impulse of faith animated them to this pure conflict."

Gerhard Tersteegen 1697-1769

Huw Lewis

## Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

**In the twelfth century a remarkable movement sprung up within the church with the foundation of the Cistercian monastic order in 1097. It involved scores of men and women of all ages embracing a lifestyle of celibacy, self-denial and prayer in order to express their devotion to Jesus. Central to this movement was a Frenchman, Bernard of Clairvaux.**

Bernard was the third son of a French aristocratic family. He was born at Fontaines, a castle near Dijon, which belonged to his father. His mother, a godly woman, offered all her seven children to the Lord at their birth. However, she particularly dedicated Bernard to the Church as Hannah did to her young son Samuel (as recorded in the Old Testament) and from that day she considered him as not belonging to her but to God.

Bernard's brothers were sent to be soldiers but Bernard was sent to be educated. He was a brilliant scholar but, more than anything, as a young man he longed to serve God and turn his back on the prestige and wealth his background, education and ability offered him. He prayed earnestly that God would show him what to do and it was at this point that he decided to take up the call to celibacy and become a monk. His brothers and friends tried to dissuade him but he ended up persuading them to follow him!

In all, 30 men accompanied him when he eventually set off for the Cistercian monastery at Citeaux, including all of his brothers (apart from the youngest), an uncle and a close friend. As they left, Guy, Bernard's eldest brother, said to Nivard, the youngest brother, "Adieu, my little brother Nivard; you will have all our estates and land to yourself!" The boy answered, "What! You then take heaven for your portion, and leave me only the earth. The division is too unequal." Nivard joined them later – as did Bernard's father. Bernard's sister, Humberline, would later enter a celibate community Bernard founded for women.

Bernard became renowned for his devotion to Jesus; his great love was to be in the secret place adoring Him. He also possessed strong leadership skills and in 1115, now a young man of 24, was made the abbot of a new monastery at Clairvaux. Twelve monks went with him (including his brothers) and they were to be joined by many others. Daughter houses and offshoots were planted in other countries

in other European countries as well as France.

A strong anointing rested on Clairvaux and it acted as a magnet for those seeking God's ways; many would-be disciples arrived seeking to live under Bernard's direction. Once, one hundred novices made vows of celibacy and commitment to the disciplines of the community on the same day! On another occasion several German noblemen who called to see the monastery were so strongly affected by what they saw that, after leaving and having gone a little way talking amongst themselves, they returned, hung up their swords and chose to remain and become monks. Bernard himself loved to persuade people to embrace a celibate, self-denying lifestyle within a religious community in order to be devoted to Jesus and it was said that mothers hid their sons and wives their husbands when Bernard was around!

Bernard was appointed bishop and archbishop several times but he declined the position. However, one church historian has commented that from within the community he lived, he governed all the churches in western Europe. He travelled extensively and often, when called upon, arbitrated in both affairs of church and state. Indeed, the most important matters of the church were referred to him and the Pope went to him for advice. Bernard always stood up for what he felt was right and he was not afraid to challenge those he thought were in the wrong. He spoke out strongly against bishops living in luxury; he quelled anti-Jewish riots in Germany. The common people hung upon his words and throughout his life he was used by God to perform miracles and healing. Bernard was also a writer of hymns, poems and books; some of his hymns such as 'Jesus, the very thought of Thee with sweetness fills the breast' are still sung today.

When Bernard died, he left an outstanding legacy. There were 700 hundred monks at Clairvaux and many more in the 163 other monasteries that he founded. It is said that all Europe mourned 'the greatest saint of the age.'

**'mothers hid their sons and wives their husbands when Bernard was around!'**



**Jo-Hannah White, 34, became a Christian in 1991 and made her celibate vow in 1996. She lives in a Jesus Fellowship community house in Kettering, Northamptonshire. She writes about her journey as a celibate.**

I am a celibate because I have met THE most amazing person, and He has all my love. I want to do things with Him and for Him. I do not want to waste my life going after things that do not last. Heaven is going to be full of loving Jesus and I have started doing that now!

My celibate journey began in the summer of 1995 when I graduated from Nottingham University and moved into a Jesus Fellowship community house. I think I had known deep down when I was baptised and made covenant with the Jesus Fellowship in 1992 that community and celibacy would follow. I have always felt that either God is not real and worth nothing, or He is real and He is worth everything. This did not stop me falling for someone in the Christian Union at university.

In one of the big church meetings, quite out of the blue, I felt God asking me, "What if I never gave you anyone especially for you?" God never said, "I want you to be celibate", just "What if..."

In October 1995 I went to the Jesus Fellowship's main celibates' meeting. At the end our senior

## 'He is worth everything'

pastor gave an invitation for those who wanted to receive the gift of celibacy to stand up. I thought, "I can't, my spirit will explode if I do that." Then I heard God saying (one of the few times I have heard His audible voice) "Well, I'll bless you where you are then" and in that moment I received an anointing of laughter and shaking. It was a release of the Holy Spirit like I had never known before.

In August 1996 I made my celibate vow: I was TOTALLY in love with Jesus. About a month later I had a celebration (a bit like a wedding reception) to publicly confirm the vow.

The gift is not like a slot machine that when you post so much in you get so much out. The gift is a lifestyle thing, a tool or a path towards a fulfilled and blessed life, but not a guarantee or a free plane ticket to paradise.

I like to think of all the things that I am now doing that I would not be able to do if I was not a celibate. The biggest one is that I work in one of our church businesses and I have quite a responsible job. Working in a church business has been a big training ground for me. Not being someone who is mega outgoing, I do really appreciate the contact with people that I would not normally meet.

I dare to say that there is an intimacy in worship that a celibate person can reach into that is not the same for a married person. It is not that married people do

not experience deep and intimate worship; yet when I sing, "Jesus, You are my first love" or "You are my passion," I really do mean it.

When people make their marriage vows they are promising to love that person only, to be true to them, and to renounce all other loves. This is not that different to the celibate vow. We promise to be true to Jesus, to renounce any other relationship for the sake of having particular intimacy with Jesus. The celibate will raise spiritual children and build church family.

Having a wide range of wholesome friendships really is a lifeline to a celibate. Celibates are free to give themselves in a variety of friendships in a way that married people cannot. A celibate has chosen not to belong to one particular person, in order to belong to everyone.

I think the biggest battle that many celibates face is keeping the gift alive. We have made the sacrifice and chosen the life for a purpose, but it is so easy to let it slide into merely "un-marriedness" and live an ineffective boring life. The celibate life is meant to be a power source within. It is meant to spring out of passionate love for Jesus, and spur us into passionate acts of love, service and devotion to Him and the Church, for the Kingdom's sake. Celibacy is more than "not being married and having sex", it is about being set apart for Jesus and being pure and holy in body, soul and spirit.



## QUOTE

"Celibacy continues to be, in some ways, analogous to martyrdom. Just as persecuted Christians died willingly for the cause of the One who suffered ultimate pain and abandonment on their behalf, celibates seek to embrace the unfulfilled longing and loss their choice entails as an act of self-giving and an opportunity for prophetic ministry. A Christian commitment to celibacy is based on understanding love not as mutual possession, but as radical generosity made possible by the self-giving love of Christ. Celibacy, when lived out well, is a way of embodying the self-sacrificing other-centred love of the Cross through one's sexuality."

**The Witness of Celibate Sexuality: Dayna Olson**

## 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.lewis@jesus.org.uk**



## 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



**NEW SEVEN SILVER RINGS OUT NOW!**

An updated and enlarged Seven Silver Rings has been published. This includes new chapters on the history and biblical background to Celibacy as well as answering some of those frequently asked questions about living single for Jesus. Comprehensive and challenging, it sets out to show how a radical lifestyle of undivided love for Jesus and His church

is possible in the 21st century. This voluntary choice is far removed from the institutional forms of celibacy.



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