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## Benedict Hesse's Teaching on Conjugal Abstinence

This article focuses on conjugal abstinence in the teaching of the great Polish theologian, Benedict Hesse, who lived and worked in Cracow during the fifteenth century. In his work *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, Hesse focuses his discussion on chastity and conjugal abstinence in the context of several other subjects, including: the superiority of virginity over marriage; the superiority of virginal chastity over conjugal abstinence; the issue of assessing the pleasure of conjugal sexual intercourse; matters pertaining to modesty of the spouses and their exterior appearance; as well as castration for the Kingdom of Heaven. The issues that Hesse raises in relation to chastity and conjugal abstinence might bring a smile to a contemporary reader's face, since they seem mostly anecdotal and basic. This article is not a complete and systematic lecture on conjugal abstinence.

**Key words:** Benedict Hesse, conjugal chastity, conjugal abstinence, virginity, castration, spousal dress.

### Introduction

Benedict Hesse,<sup>1</sup> a Polish philosopher and theologian who taught in Cracow during the middle of the fifteenth century, presents his teaching on marriage and family, among other topics, in his *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew*. God created man as male and female and,

<sup>1</sup> Benedict Hesse (b. 1389 in Cracow, d. 1456) was a Polish scholar, philosopher, and theologian. He came from a bourgeois Cracovian family. He studied liberal arts, graduated in the field of theology, obtaining a Bachelor of Arts in 1411 and a Masters degree in 1415. After completing his studies, he was a professor in Cracow as well as the rector of the University Cracow several times.

therefore, sexually differentiated (Gen 1:27). Masculinity and femininity determine man's mission on earth.<sup>2</sup> God entrusted man with the duty to procreate and have dominion over the earth. This dominion should first begin in man himself.<sup>3</sup> After original sin, the initial harmony that existed within creation was upset. As a result, man became enslaved to sin and concupiscence. With the fall, however, man did not completely lose his freedom or rational ability to freely make decisions. Thanks to God's grace, man can and should realize his vocation as a person who has both a soul and a body.<sup>4</sup> Within marriage, which the Creator instituted, sexuality rediscovers its authentic dimension intended by God. Nowadays, the vocation to marriage is considered one of the specific Christian vocations to holiness.<sup>5</sup> Married life consists in building a "communion of persons" in love through the spouses' reciprocal and free gift of self. The exclusive and defining feature of the conjugal gift is the "unity of the body," which is inherently directed to fertility, meaning the gift of new life.<sup>6</sup>

Usually the topic of conjugal abstinence is related to the issue of marital and family love. In Polish a rich body of literature dedicated to the different aspects of conjugal love exists.<sup>7</sup> More recently, in his work *Love and Responsibility*, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła made significant contributions to the understanding of married love and human

<sup>2</sup> S. Stefanek, "Mężczyznę i niewiastę stworzył ich. Płeć w Biblii," *Studia nad Rodziną* 1, no. 1 (1997): 12; P. Anciaux, *Le Sacrement du Mariage* (Louvain-Paris: 1963), 196.

<sup>3</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 377, accessed October 29, 2021, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).

<sup>4</sup> J. Bajda, "Płeć a powołanie," *Studia nad Rodziną* 1, no. 1 (1997): 21; J. Bajda, "Konsekracja ciała w aspekcie powołania osoby," in Jan Paweł II, *Mężczyznę i niewiastę stworzył ich. Chrystus odwołuje się do „początku”* (Lublin 1981), 185-202.

<sup>5</sup> J. Bajda, "Powołanie małżeństwa i rodziny. Próba syntezy teologiczno-moralnej," in *Teologia małżeństwa i rodziny*, ed. K. Majdański (Warszawa: 1880), 7-156.

<sup>6</sup> J. Bajda, "Powołanie chrześcijańskie a moralność małżeńska," in *Posługa spowiedników w realizacji powołania małżeńskiego* (Łomianki: 1999), 35.

<sup>7</sup> J. Laskowski, *Małżeństwo i rodzina w świetle nauki Soboru Watykańskiego II* (Warszawa: 1979); M. Masini, ed, *Małżeństwo chrześcijańskie* (Warszawa: 1983); A. Zienkiewicz, *Miłości trzeba się uczyć* (Częstochowa: 1986); J. Vanier, *Mężczyznę i niewiastę stworzył ich do życia w prawdziwej miłości* (Kraków: 1987); K. Wiśniewska-Roszkowska, *Seks i moralność* (Warszawa-Struga-Kraków: 1988); A. Wielowiejski, *Przed nami małżeństwo* (Kraków: 1988); H. Łuczak, *Dorastanie do miłości* (Warszawa: 1989); J. Powell, *Jak kochać i być kochanym* (Pelplin: 1990); W. Szewczyk, ed., *Dorastać do miłości* (Tarnów: 1991); W. E. Papis, *Życie i miłość* (Warszawa: 1995).

sexuality.<sup>8</sup> The Second Vatican Council updated the Church's teaching on the purpose of marriage by making conjugal love and procreation equal. Pope John Paul II went even deeper in this area through his own teaching, which he transmitted through documents, speeches, and catechesis.<sup>9</sup> Currently, the Church treats the issue of sexuality clearly and openly, without being prude and manichaeistic. During the medieval period, theology approached the topic of the obligations of marriage cautiously and reservedly. At that time, theologians focused on certain aspects of marriage, particularly on the sin of impurity. For, marriage was not only meant for procreation, but also considered a cure for lust.

The primary source of Christian sexual ethics is Scripture, particularly the two passages from the Gospel of St. Matthew 5:28 and 9:18, which refer to this issue. In these passages, Christ speaks about adultery and the indissolubility of marriage. Here, the Lord restores the original commandment of purity as God intended it.<sup>10</sup> Chastity is not only a virtue but also a norm that should influence man's behavior in the area of sexuality.<sup>11</sup> Conjugal chastity is connected closely to spousal love and fertility.<sup>12</sup> The history of theology includes two approaches to practicing the virtue of chastity: through conjugal abstinence or through a vow of chastity, otherwise known as the state of virginity. Since antiquity, theologians and philosophers have deliberated on which manner of practicing chastity is the noblest.<sup>13</sup> From the beginning of Christianity, the Apostles emphasized that freely foregoing marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of God is the noblest. Never,

<sup>8</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność* (Lublin: 1982).

<sup>9</sup> T. Żeleźnik, ed, *Jan Paweł II o małżeństwie i rodzinie* (Warszawa: 1982); Jan Paweł II, *Mężczyzną i niewiastą stworzył ich. Chrystus odwołuje się do „początku”*. O Jana Pawła II teologii ciała, ed. S. Styczeń (Lublin: 1981); Jan Paweł II, *Rodzino, co mówisz o sobie? Dokumenty i przemówienia papieskie w Roku Rodziny* (Kraków: 1995).

<sup>10</sup> S. Olejnik, “Dar-Wezwanie-Odpowiedź,” *Teologia moralna, t. 7: Moralność życia społecznego* (Warszawa: 1993), 35-40.

<sup>11</sup> J. Bajda, “Czystość,” in *Słownik małżeństwa i Rodziny*, ed. E. Ozorowski (Warszawa-Łomianki: 1999), 77-79.

<sup>12</sup> P. Anciaux, *Le Sacrement du Mariage*, 149-235.

<sup>13</sup> K. Wolski, “Moralność seksualna w nauczaniu Kościoła,” *Studia nad Rodziną* 1, no. 1 (1997), 45-52; P. Brown, *Le renoncement à la chair. Virginité, célibat et continence dan le christianisme primitif* (Paris: 1995); J. E. Kerns, *Les chrétiens, le mariage et la sexualité. Évolution des attitudes chrétiennes envers la vie sexuelle et la sainteté dans le mariage* (Paris: 1966).

however, was or has the institution of marriage, in which the virtue of chastity should be cultivated through abstinence, been depreciated.

Benedict Hesse reflected extensively on chastity and conjugal abstinence as well as the relationship between marriage and virginity. The topic of virginity appears repeatedly in Benedict's writings, and he treated the topic extensively. An examination of these topics, however, would require a separate study that goes beyond the framework of this analysis. Given the topic and limitations of this paper, I will focus on Benedict Hesse's commentary on Matthew 5:8 as well as Matthew 19:10-12. The footnotes include the original quotations of Hesse's work in Latin in order to clarify his views, which are little known among the broader academic community.

## Virginity and Conjugal Abstinence

Master Benedict wondered which state—virginity or marriage—was more worthy of praise, more important, and superior. Needless to say, he concluded that virginity is a nobler state than chastity and conjugal abstinence.<sup>14</sup> Marriage points to the world, while virginity points to Heaven, where all people will be like the angels—that is, where every person will be abstinent. Hesse's arguments rely on the thought of St. Ambrose, Richard, and other ancient writers who claimed that virginity is nobler than marriage,<sup>15</sup> since virgins already live an angelic life in their flesh. The Apostles taught and Christ advised the same.<sup>16</sup> Benedict Hesse's teaching on this subject does not differ from the majority of the theologians of this era.

<sup>14</sup> P. Nehring, *Dlaczego dziewictwo jest lepsze niż małżeństwo? Spór o ideał w chrześcijaństwie zachodnim końca IV wieku w relacji Ambrożego, Hieronima i Augustyna* (Toruń: 2005); R. Rubinkiewicz, "Małżeństwo i dziewictwo w nauce św. Pawła (1 Kor 7, 1-40)," *Zeszyty Naukowe KUL* 23, no. 3 (1980): 45-50; R. Cantalamessa, *Czystego serca* (Warszawa: 1994).

<sup>15</sup> "Haec autem cordis munditia reperitur in virginibus, in viduis et coniugatis et viris ecclesiasticis. De primis, scilicet de virginibus legitur XXXII, q. 1: 'Nuptiae' in textu et in glossa, quod virginitas replet paradysum, nuptiae mundum, quia virginitas aseror est angelorum, quia ibi omnes erunt virgines, id est continentes. Unde Glossa I Ad Cor. VII at est etiam Ambrosius de viduis: 'Supergreditur etiam virginitas conditionem humanae naturas, per quam homines angelis assimilantur, maior tamen est victoria virginum quam angelorum, quia angeli sine impugnatione carnis vivunt, virgines in carne triumphant.' Unde canit Ecclesia de Virgine: 'Angelicam haec vitam duxerat in carne.'" C p. 403, B v. 16, p. 70-71.

<sup>16</sup> "Castitas est melius bonum quam coniugium, quia Christus et Apostolus dederunt consilium de isto tamquam meliori." C p. 404, B v. 16, p. 72.

In the Middle Ages, it was widely accepted that virginity was nobler than marital chastity. The virginal state is the state of perfect chastity, while the married state is a state of imperfect chastity, and that which is more perfect is of greater dignity. Hesse, however, posed a relativizing question: Which state has greater dignity: the state of complete abstinence, or the married state? According to Hesse, the valuation depends on the era in which different people live.<sup>17</sup> From the earliest ages, the Old Testament conveys that marriage has more dignity than virginity. At that time, marriage was recommended and virginity was foregone in order to increase the number of people who believed in the One God. The situation changed once Christ came and the law of the Gospels prevailed. Now is the era of multiplication through spiritual birth; therefore, virginity—a state of complete abstinence from all bodily pleasure—is considered nobler than marriage.<sup>18</sup>

In order to support his claim that virginity is a more perfect state than marriage, Hesse refers to the writings of Augustine and Jerome.<sup>19</sup> Both thinkers polemicized and argued against Jovinian, who placed marriage above virginity. Christ Himself chose a virgin as His Mother, thereby confirming the superiority of virginity. According to medieval theology, it was obvious that divine good was superior to human

<sup>17</sup> “Sed quaeritur iam utrum virginitas sit maioris meriti quam castitas coniugalis? Richardus super IV Sententiarum, distinctione XXXIV respondet: ‘Aut quaeritur et habitibus, scilicet an habitus virginitatis sit maioris meritis quam habitus coniugalis castitatis et tunc dicendum est, quod habitus virginitatis est habitus castitatis perfectus, sed habitus coniugalis est habitus castitatis imperfectus. Illud autem quod est perfectius, est maioris meriti minus perfecto vel imperfecto et virtus perfecta est maioris meriti quam imperfecta. Aut quaeritur utrum maioris meriti sit status abstinentium, scilicet ab omni venerea delectatione quam status coniugatorum. Tunc respondetur, quod hii duo status possunt referri ad idem tempus vel ad diversa tempora.’” C p. 403, B v. 16, p. 70.

<sup>18</sup> “Aut quaeritur utrum maioris meriti sit status abstinentium, scilicet ab omni venerea delectatione quam status coniugatorum. Tunc respondetur, quod hii duo status possunt referri ad idem tempus vel ad diversa tempora. Si primo modo, aut referuntur ad tempus legis scriptae et sic maioris meriti fuit status coniugatorum quam ab omni venerea delectatione abstinentium. Unde status coniugatorum tunc praecipiebatur et virginum prohibebatur propter fidelium multiplicationem. Sed nunc, tempore legis Evangelicae, quod est tempus multiplicationis per spiritualem Generationem, maioris meriti est status ab omni venerea delectatione abstinentium quam coniugatorum. Si autem illi duo status referuntur ad diversa tempore, ut status coniugatorum ad tempus legis scriptae et status abstinentium ad tempus: ‘Evangelicae legis, sic quolibet statu in suo esse optimo considerato unus alteri non praefertur.’” C p. 403-404, B v. 16, p. 71.

<sup>19</sup> A. Kozłowska, *Kobieta w pismach świętego Augustyna o małżeństwie i dziewictwie* (Warszawa: 2006); A. Eckmann, ed, *Pisma świętego Augustyna o małżeństwie i dziewictwie*, arr. W. Eborowicz (Lublin: 2003).

good—that the good of the soul was superior to the good of the body, and that contemplative life is of higher value than the active life.<sup>20</sup>

Virgins live like angels here on earth because they begin to live here what will be ours only after the resurrection of the dead. We will rise in our gendered bodies, but we will not procreate or engage in sexual intercourse in Heaven.<sup>21</sup> Hesse continually refers to Jerome when substantiating this argument.<sup>22</sup>

Virgins make up the apocalyptic procession and follow the Lamb wherever He goes (Rev 14:4). They follow Christ not only in the integrity of the purity of their thoughts, but also in the integrity of their flesh. Master Benedict asserts that the practice of marrying virgins who have already made a vow of chastity should be condemned. Anyone who does this commits a mortal sin because he steals God’s own bride. Such a sin is unforgivable because the harm done cannot be atoned. No human person can restore the purity lost through sexual intercourse.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> “Unde Augustinus in libro De statu coniugali dicit: ‘Non est impar meritum continentiae in Iohanno qui nullas expertus est nuptias, et in Abraham qui filios genuit.’ Sed loquendo de tempora evangelicae legis tunc multis scripturis et auctoritatibus et rationibus patet excellentia virginitatis. Unde Hieronymus contra Iovinianum dicit hunc fuisse errorem Ioviniani, qui posuit virginitatem non esse matrimonio praefendam, qui destruitur exemplo Christi, qui elegit matrem Virginem et servavit, virginitatem consulit tamquam malius bonum. Unde dicit, quod multipliciter beator erit, si sic permanserit secundum suum consilium et rationibus, Patet tum quia bonum divinum est potius humano, tum quia bonum animae praefertur bono corporis, tum quia bonum vitae contemplativae praefertur bono vitae activae.” C p. 404, B v. 16, p. 71.

<sup>21</sup> W. Turek, “Dziewictwo rozumiane jako ustawiczna walka dla Pana. Fundamenty biblijne w Liście 22 św. Hieronima do Eustochium,” *Vox Patrum* 76 (2020): 107-130.

<sup>22</sup> “Et quae potest esse maior gloria mortalium in terra quam in carno ducere angelicam vitam, quod alii tantum sperant post hanc vitam? Audi Hieronymus contra Iovinianum super illud Mt. XXII et Lucae XX: ‘In resurrectione non nubent neque nubentur, sed similes erunt angelis.’ Dicit: ‘Quod alii postea in caelis futuri sunt, hoc virgines in terris esse coeperunt.’ Si angelorum nobis similitudo promittitur, inter angelos autem non est sequens diversitas, aut sine sexu erimus, quod angeli sunt, aut certe, quod limpide approbatur resurgentes in proprio sexu, sexus non fungebunt officio. Et Hieronymus in sermone ad Paulam et Eustochium sic inquit: ‘Haec vita vobis de caelo fluxit, quam professe estis supra usum naturae, nec inmerito usum vivendi de caelo quaesistis, quae vobis de caelo sponsum petistis.’ Hanc gloriam, scilicet angelice vivere habent in praesenti virgines.” C p. 404, B v. 16, p. 71-72.

<sup>23</sup> “Sed qualis ipsorum erit gloria in futuro? Apocalypsis XIV: ‘Hi sunt qui cum mulieribus non sunt coinquinati; virgines enim sunt: et sequuntur Agnum quocumque ierit.’ Agnus enim Christus graditur itinere virginali, virgines enim sequi Agnum quocumque ierit est imitari Christum non solum in integritate mentis, sed etiam in integritate carnis. Unde dico, quod voventi virginitatem

According to Hesse, virginity does not have absolute value; it is not a moral virtue in every case.<sup>24</sup> Not everyone who makes a vow of virginity is rewarded with the full glory of heaven or the aureole of sanctity. To preserve one's virginity requires a lot of effort and sacrifice. The most perfect examples of virginity are Christ and Mary.<sup>25</sup> Since neither had the stain of sin or a shadow of lust in them, their spirit did not need to be victorious over their flesh. With regard to the effort necessary to maintain abstinence, a widow must exert a greater effort in resisting

damnabile est nubere et contresens cum tali scienter peccat mortaliter ideo, quia rapit sponsam Deo et non potest eam sic restituere, peccatum enim prius non dimittitur nisi ablatum restituatur et, dispositam puellam et volentem caste vivera nemo debet retrahere. Sed ex quo est tam magnum bonum, nullus ipsum vel auxilii regulariter debet impedire nisi subsit impedimentum tale, ex quo magna elicitur et violenta praesumptio de recessu a bono incepto. Ratio Sapientis: 'Noli prohibere benefacere volentem, sed si potes et ipse fac.'" C p. 404, B v. 16, p. 72.

<sup>24</sup> "Ad quartam videtur, quod non multipliciter, Primo sic: nulla virtus est in nobis a natura, 2 Ethicorum, sed virginitas est natura, ergo etc. Secundo sic: omnis virtus moralis generatur ex actibus frequentatis, virginitas non, ergo etc, Tertio sic: nulla virtus aufertur involuntarie, virginitas autem aufertur involuntarie, sicut patet in oppressis, ergo etc. Quarto sic: nulla virtus perditur sine peccato, sed virginitas perditur sine peccato et meritorie per matrimonium, 1 Cor. 7: 'Non peccat virgo, si nubat,' ergo etc. Quinto sic: 'Omnis virtus amissa potest per paenitentiam restitui,' dicit Hieronymus. Sed virginitas amissa numquam potest restitui, ergo etc. Sexto sic: nulla vera virtus est in infidelibus, sicut Augustinus probat Contra Iulianum, libro tertio: 'Absit, inquit, ut in aliquo sit vera virtus, nisi sit iustus.' Absit autem, quod vere iustus sit, nisi vivat ex fide; sed virginitas est in infidelibus, sicut patuit de virginibus deae Vestae sacratis, quarum una aquam de Tiberi portavit in cribro in signum virginitatis, sicut recitat Augustinus, De civitate Dei, c.10 et Valerius, libro VIII, c.1. Septimo, sicut omne, quod recedit a medio virtutis, est vitiosum, sic virginitas est huiusmodi, Probatur, dicit enim Philosophus 3 Ethicorum, quod qui omni voluptate patitur, nec quia ab una recedit est intemperatus; qui autem omnes fugit, est agrestis et insensibilis; sed virginitas recedit ab omnibus voluptatibus venereis, ergo etc. Octavo sic: quicquid est contra praeceptum legis divinae, est vitiosum; virginitas est huiusmodi, quia praeceptum est Gen. 1: 'Crescite et multiplicamini et replete terram.' Confirmatur, quia sicut praeceptum de conservatione individui est de praeceptis legis naturae, ita praeceptum de conservatione speciei; ergo sicut peccaret, qui abstineret ab omni cibo, ita peccat, qui ab omni actu generationis abstinet. Nono sic: nulla virtus indiget sacrificiis expiari, sed Plato legitur suam continentiam perpetuam expiasset et sacrificasse diis, scilicet Veneri pro eiusdem continentiae vitio abolendum, secundum Augustinum, De vera religione. Decimo: qui habet unam virtutem, habet omnes, sed qui habet unam virginitatem, quandoque habet alias virtutes, ergo virginitas non est vera virtus." E p. 215-216, B v. 26, p. 161.

<sup>25</sup> J. P. Torrell, *Dziewica Maryja w wierze katolickiej* (Poznań: 2013).

temptations of the flesh than a virgin.<sup>26</sup> Following Jerome's thought, Hesse asserts that the greater the effort to overcome temptations of the flesh, the greater the reward. Widows, however, do not deserve a special "aureole." The aforementioned considerations are related to questions regarding whether or not a person merits an aureole for remaining a virgin until death.

Hesse presented many instances where virginity is doubtful and supports his arguments with the authoritative writings of Aristotle, Augustine, Peter Lombard, and other writers. He makes a distinction between bodily and spiritual virginity. Hesse notes that there are people who retain their bodily virginity but violate it in their thoughts by savoring and contemplating impure thoughts. Virginity is often associated with making a vow. This vow can be broken through the decision to marry. In another case, a person may be raped and thus physically no longer be a virgin but remains a virgin in thought and interiorly. Benedict also asked: "Can virginity that has been lost be regained?"<sup>27</sup> This question will be answered in another section of

<sup>26</sup> "Ad quintam videtur, quod non, quia sic tunc, ubi esset perfectior virginitas, magis deberetur aureole; sed perfectissima virginitas fuit in Christo et in beata Virgine, quia nullam pugnam habuerunt et sustinuerunt in continendo, et per consequens nulla fuit in eis victoria spiritus supra carnem, ergo si eis ratione virginitatis non debetur aureole, in quibus tamen fuit potissima virginitas, videtur, quod nulli alteri ratione virginitatis debeatur, Praeterea maiorem difficultatem in abstinendo a venereis sustinent viduae quam virgines, ergo maiores habent victoriam, si bene vivant; sed eis non debetur aureole, ergo nec virginibus. Assumptum patet ex dicto Hieronimi de viduis dicentis, quod quanto maior est difficultas, experte a quibusdam voluptatibus illecebris abstinere, tanto maius est praemium." E p. 218; B v. 26, p. 164.

<sup>27</sup> "Et Aristoteles De animalibus dicit, quod iuvenes virgines corruptae magis appetunt coitum propter rememorativam delectationis, ergo etc. Praeterea tanti meriti est castitas coniugalis, sicut virginitas; sed castitati coniugali non debetur aureole, ergo etc. Assumptum patet per illud Augustini De bono coniugali, c.4 et allegat Magister Sententiarum, 4 distinctione, 33 capitulo: si non est impar meritum patientiae in Petro, qui passus est et in Ioanne, qui non est passus, sic non est impar continentiae meritum in Ioanne, qui non est expers nuptias et in Abraham, qui filios genuit, Praeterea naturali necessitate non correspondet praemium, sed quidam sunt naturaliter impotentes ad generandum, sicut frigidi et castrati a iuventute; ergo in istis saltem virginitas non meretur aureolem. Praeterea secundum Augustinum, De sancta virginitate et allegatum fuit quaestione praecedenti 'Quodcumque gaudium,' quod virginitas est continentia, qua carnis et animae integritas ipsi Creatori vovetur, consecratur et fundatur; ergo nullam mereretur aureolem, nisi quae cadit sub voto, ut videtur, Praeterea ponamus, quod aliqua virgo nubat seu concubetur ante copulam carnalem, moriatur; quaero, an ista habebit aureolem virginitatis, aut non. Si non, qui contraheret cum tali, non foret bigamus; ergo contraheret cum virgine, quia omnis contrahens matrimonium cum vidua vel corrupta, est bigamus, dist. 33



this article. Master Benedict proceeded to explain what he means by heavenly beatitude and the aureole. Heavenly beatitude consists in seeing God face to face in the joy that the soul experience in its victory. However, this is not the ordinary state of heavenly sanctity. He classically makes the distinction between three kinds of aureoles—those given to virgins, martyrs, and doctors of the Church. There is also an aureole for the soul and another for the body.<sup>28</sup>

Hesse continued by explaining the difficulties associated with virginity. He stated that the aureole of virginity belongs to the Virgin Mary and Christ, even though they did not have to fight against the flesh because they remained sinless from the beginning until the very end of their lives. Both, however, were tempted and their reason was

‘Maritum’ et Extra, De bigamiis nuptiarum, ‘Si tamen aureolem.’ Contra illa non est virgo mente, quia secundum Augustinum, De nuptiis et concupiscentiis, virginitas est in carne corruptibili incorruptionis perpetua meditatio; sed ipsa fuit in proposito solvendi virginitatem, igitur perdidit virginitatem. Praeterea ponamus, quod aliquis voveat virginitatem et postea corrumpatur mente, quia vult omnino ex deliberatione committere actum luxuriae, iste est corruptus mente, ergo non habebit aureolem. Contra: est integer carne et postea paenituit, ergo recuperavit virginitatem, ergo habebit. Praeterea habeat aliquis voluntatem nubendi et sic discedat; quaeritur, numquid habebit aureolem.” E p. 218-219, B v. 26, p. 165.

<sup>28</sup> “Primo, quod praemium dupliciter dabitur beatis, videlicet essenziale et actuale, Praemium essenziale consistit in fruitione essentiae divinae clare in se. Praemium actuale dicitur, quod non est de Deo clare visio, sed de creatura. Secundo nota, quod praemium actuale dicitur dupliciter, Primo modo dicitur specialiter gaudium de aliquo actu animae importante excellentem victoriam habitam meritorie in praesenti. Alio modo dicitur communiter victoria excellens est in triplici materia gaudium de re creata. Tertio notandum, quod actus excellentis victoriae in praesenti potest esse in materia triplici secundum triplicem pugnam quam habemus, videlicet contra carnem, contra mundum et contra diabolium. Contra carnem excellentissima victoria est virginitas, quae est virtus, nam virtuose respuit omnes venereas delectationes, tam licitas quam illicitas, sicut in praesenti lectione dictum est. Contra mundum, id est contra malos homines mundanos, qui bonos persequuntur est contemnunt, perfectissima victoria est martyrium propter Christum. Contra diabolium, qui falsis suggestionibus nos conatur seducere perfectissima victoria est praedicatio sive doctrina, qua homo semetipsum non solum bene regit, sed etiam corrigit et instruit; Et item tribus generibus hominum: virginibus, martyribus et doctoribus, tres aureoles deputantur propter tres actus privilegiatae victoriae. Quarto notandum, quod beatitudo essentialis vocatur metaphorice corona vel aurea, beatitudo vero vel gaudium actuale debitum operis excellentis victoriae vocatur aureole et hoc pro tanto, quod omne gaudium in beato est minus quam gaudium essenziale de Deo. Et ideo per terminum diminutivum oportuit denotari. Quinto notandum: sicut aureole est in anima, ita etiam aureole in corpus per aliquod signum evidens illi correspondens redundat, quod quale erit, non est mihi notum.” E p. 219, B v. 26, p. 165-166.

victorious by maintaining mastery over their flesh.<sup>29</sup> Hesse explained the difference between a widow and virgin's situation. A widow must overcome the memory of sensual pleasure, while the virgin does not have such memories. A virgin, on the other hand, is also exposed to attacks of the imagination and is moved by curiosity, which is an even greater difficulty and hardship than those that widows experience.<sup>30</sup> It is important to recall that an aureole is bestowed on a person not only because he has merited it, but also because he has achieved victory and mastery over the flesh. This is the reason why St. Catherine was given an aureole, while St. Mary Magdalene was not, even though Mary Magdalene had gained greater merit. Chastity and conjugal abstinence are not equivalent to chastity for the time of grace. Those who enter into marriage are not given an aureole.<sup>31</sup> People who preserve natural bodily integrity and virginity can either maintain it or destroy it. They should maintain purity of thought. If they are interiorly corrupt then they cannot receive an aureole in heaven.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> "Ad primum in oppositum de Virgine gloriosa tenet sanctus Thomas, quod aureolem habuit, tamen nullam pugnam a carne sensit, sed ab hoste habuit tentationes de carne; de Christo dicit, quod non habet aureolem formaliter sub ratione aureolee, quia terminus iste 'aureole' importat victoriam participatam ab alia, quod Christo non convenit, in quo est plenitudo victoriae. Et similiter importat, quod aureole ab aliquo principe conferatur. Potest aliter dicere, quod ille terminus 'victoria' dicit dominium rationis super carnem et notat resistantiam, quae non fuit in Christo, nec in matre, sed quia fuit plenus dominium rationis, inde habent aureolem ex alia causa debitam tam eis quam nobis." E p. 219-220, B v. 26, p. 166

<sup>30</sup> "Ad secundum dicendum, quod si attendas unam occasionem tentationis carnalis, quae est recordatio ex parte voluptatis habitae, constat, quod hoc est in viduis et non in virginibus; et tamen in virginibus imaginatio quaedam ex parte lasciviae ex omnibus istis tribus circumstantiis, quae sunt desiderium experiendi de curiositate, sicut homo magis desiderat videre modicum negotium quod numquam vidit quam unum monasterium. Secundo est aestimatio maioris delectationis, quod sit in rei veritate, Tertio ignorantia incomodorum et turpitudinis concomitantis et ideo simpliciter loquendo tentatio seu pugna virginum est difficilior quam viduarum." E p. 220, B v. 26, p. 166.

<sup>31</sup> "Ad tertium dicendum, quod non ideo datur aureole, quin est maioris meriti, sed quia est indistinctum singularis victoriae vel domini super carnem. Unde Catherina habet aureolem virginitatis et Magdalena non; et tamen Magdalena est maioris meriti. Tamen castitas coniugalis et castitas pro tempore gratiae non aequiparantur. Sed castitas antiquorum potest aequiparari virginitati Novae Legis et excedere et excedi. Sed non sequitur, quod istae duae personae aequiparentur in merito; ergo si una habeat aureolem, ergo et alia, ut frigidi naturaliter nubere non potentes habent aureolem." E p. 220, B v. 26, p. 167.

<sup>32</sup> "Ad quartum dicendum, quod vel tales naturaliter casti conformant suum propositum suae necessitati sic, quod si essent dispositi, nollent violare, et tunc

Following the authority of St. Augustine, Hesse stated that the person who has vowed to abstain from all bodily pleasure and perseveres in this resolution until death merits the aureole of virginity. If this vow is broken, then the person will never receive an aureole. If this vow has been broken only through the interior act of desire for bodily pleasure and the physical act has not taken place, then the aureole can be regained through penance.<sup>33</sup> St. John the Evangelist, who regained the virginity that he had lost when Christ called him to be His disciple at St. John's own wedding, is an example. St. John retained his virginity because he had maintained his bodily integrity and his thoughts had always remained pure.<sup>34</sup> This view was held during the Middle Ages by such thinkers as St. Thomas Aquinas<sup>35</sup> and during the Renaissance by Anthony of Florence and his contemporary Benedict Hesse, who states that St. John, upon witnessing the miracle of water

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habebunt aut non; sed sunt menti corrupti et tunc non habebunt." E p. 220, B v. 26, p. 167.

<sup>33</sup> "Ad quintum de dicto Augustini dicendum, quod aureole virginitatis competit cuicumque habenti propositum abstinendi a venerea voluptate, si illud propositum numquam fuerit effectualiter, id est per effectum operis interruptum pro experientiam appositam usque ad mortem, Si fuerit effectualiter interruptum, numquam habebit. Si vero fuerit voluptas interrupta per propositum contrarium sine effectu, sicut si persona forte consensit ex deliberatione in actum venereum, distinguendum est, vel quia postea paenitet de isto assensu quem nullum opus sequebatur, et tunc adhuc habebit aureolem, quia virginitas, quae est virtus, per paenitentiam restituitur; vel non paenitet circa mortem et tunc numquam habebit, etiam dato, quod salvetur." E p. 220, B v. 26, p. 167.

<sup>34</sup> "Ad sextum per idem dicitur, quod si idem propositum carnalis commixtionis abluit per paenitentiam dolens, quia discontinuaverat propositum continendi vel non; si sic, habebit, sed non nequaquam. Et sic Ioannes Evangelista virginitatem recuperavit perditam, quando Christus eum de nuptiis volentem nubere revocavit secundum Hieronymum. Et ultra pro argumento nota, quod corruptio inducens bigamiam est solutio integritatis carnis, non corruptio mentis." E p. 220, B v. 26, p. 167.

<sup>35</sup> "On the contrary, No one that consents to carnal intercourse is a virgin in mind and body. Yet Blessed John the evangelist after consenting to marriage was a virgin both in mind and body. Therefore he did not consent to carnal intercourse. Further, the effect corresponds to its cause. Now consent is the cause of marriage. Since then carnal intercourse is not essential to marriage, seemingly neither is the consent which causes marriage a consent to carnal intercourse. T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, "Of the Object of Consent-Whether the consent that makes a marriage is consent to carnal intercourse?" Q. 48, obj. 1, accessed October 4, 2021, <https://sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/sum593.htm>.

turned into wine, did not consummate his marriage, left his wife, and became Christ's disciple.<sup>36</sup>

In heaven there are many people who preserved their bodily integrity but who did not merit the aureole of virginity. There are others, on the other hand, who lost their bodily integrity because they were raped during attacks by barbarians and who received the aureole of virginity because they were faithful to their resolution to preserve abstinence by the purity of their thoughts. Hesse did not seem to think that children who have not gone through puberty could merit the aureole of virginity.<sup>37</sup>

## Carnal Pleasure in Marriage

Benedict Hesse touched upon the complicated matter of assessing the carnal pleasure of sexual intercourse in marriage. He clearly asks whether it is always a mortal sin when the spouses have sexual intercourse purely to experience pleasure and not to fulfill their duty to conceive children.<sup>38</sup> Hesse's response to this question is quite radical. Hesse bases his response on Richard's opinion that, if a husband has sexual intercourse with his wife for any other reason than conceiving offspring, faith, or other purpose of marriage, then it is a mortal sin. In such an act, the man's wife becomes a stranger, and sexual intercourse with a stranger is contrary to the marital honesty that the spouses vowed to each other on their wedding day.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Aquinas, T., *Summa Theologica*, Q. 152, Article 4, accessed October 5, 2021, <https://sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/sum409.htm>.

<sup>37</sup> "Ad octavum similiter ex dictis patet, quod multae virgines secundum carnem carebunt in caelo aureolem virginitatis, sicut illae quae moriuntur cum proposito nubendi. Multae etiam corruptae secundum carnem, manente tamen proposito continendi, sicut fuit de oppressis a barbaris, habebunt aureolem. De pueris autem infra aetatem utriusque sexus, non video, quare aureolem habere debent, in quibus nec fuit virginitas, quae est virtus, nec victoria aliqua super carnem." E p. 220, B v. 26, p. 167.

<sup>38</sup> "Sed de concubitu eorum quaero, utrum concubitus coniugum non causa reddendi debitum nec prolis procreandi semper sit mortale peccatum?" C p. 406, B v. 16, p. 75.

<sup>39</sup> "Richardus super 4 Sententiarum, distinctione XXXI, articulo ultimo dicit, quod intentio concubentis cum uxore propria non propter bonum prolis aut fidei aut exit finem matrimonii ita, quod hoc vellet facere etiamsi non esset sua uxor, et tunc semper est mortale peccatum ille actus; aut si sit in actu et habitu intra fines matrimonii sic, quod non vellet concubere cum ea, si non esset propria eius uxor et talis concubitus non est mortale peccatum, quia excusatur propter matrimonii honestatem." C p. 406, B v. 16, p. 75-76.

If bodily pleasure is contrary to the purpose of marriage, and if a husband wants to have sexual intercourse with his wife as if she were a stranger, then they commit mortal sin because such pleasure does not arise within the bounds and purposes of marriage. If, however, the couple has sexual intercourse to experience bodily pleasure along with the intention to fulfill their marital obligations, and if they remain open to conceiving a child, then they commit a venial sin, since—after the original sin of Adam and Eve—marriage was instituted not only as a duty to bear children (*officium naturae*), but also as a remedy for concupiscence and the maladies of delight and fornication.<sup>40</sup> Today such a radical and negative view of sexual intercourse is unthinkable.

According to Hesse, marrying only for pleasure and not to conceive offspring can be evaluated differently, depending on the situation. The inability to conceive offspring may not be the spouses' fault and may be due, for example, to impotence because of advanced age, sickness, or mental handicap. Even though such individuals have carnal desires, they cannot conceive and bear offspring. Benedict stated that many people have animalistic habits arising from disordered and uncontrolled carnal desires. In acting on these desires, they abuse their wives and alter the natural order of human reproduction. Such sexual relations are sinful, but they do not invalidate the institution of marriage. There are also people who love sin and the pleasures of the flesh. They seek to avoid conception by all means, including by withdrawal (*coitus interruptus*). Other people decide to remain infertile or even kill the conceived child. Referring to Augustine, Hesse stated that such relations are not only sinful but also should not be considered conjugal. Such behavior is essentially an obstacle to contracting a

<sup>40</sup> "Ad secundam est dicendum, quod aliud est quaerere, utrum delectatio libidinosa faciat virum et uxorem peccare mortaliter, et aliud est quaerere, utrum talis delectatio, quam intendunt absque filiorum generandorum intentione faciat inter eos non esse matrimonium. Quia si quaeritur, an talis delectatio libidinosa faciat virum et uxorem peccare mortaliter, dicendum est, quod si talis delectatio tollat ordinem finis ultimi, ita quod talis etiam propter Dei praeceptum non dimitteret, quin vellet sic delectari cum uxore sua vel cum alia, dato, quod uxor sua non esset, peccatum mortale esset, quia hoc modo delectatio ista non stat infra terminos et limites matrimonii. Si autem talis delectatio stat infra terminos et limites matrimonii, ita quod nec cum illa nec cum ista vellet sic delectari, si uxor non esset, tunc dato, quod filiorum generationem non intendat, in actu illo venialiter peccat, sed non mortaliter, quia post peccatum primorum parentum matrimonium non solum fuit in officio naturae propter generationem proles, verum etiam fuit in remedium causa delectationis et vitandae fornicationis." C p. 43, B v. 8, p. 109. See also: T. Rowiński, "Małżeństwo – lekarstwem na pożądliwość," *Christianitas* 73 (2018): 39-44.

valid marriage.<sup>41</sup> Today, when secular society considers such perverse behavior acceptable, Hesse's radical position would be deemed unacceptable. On Her part, the Church does reject a purely hedonistic understanding of the purpose of marriage and appreciates the value of sexual intercourse and integral conjugal love.<sup>42</sup>

## Modest Dress in Marriage

The problem of conjugal abstinence is also related to the external appearance, especially manner of dress, and how a person presents himself to other people. In the Middle Ages, the Church recalled that spouses should dress modestly. In this regard, Hesse referred to Gregory, Jerome, and Augustine. Adorning oneself is not a sin in itself, and a person can gain the favor of others in this way. However, care must be taken not to overdo it and not to be consumed by vanity. Wearing solemn garments and adorning oneself are permitted both for spouses and for single persons, but they are not obliged to do so. A husband tries to please his wife, while the single person should strive to please God. Primping and preening as well as sloppiness should be

<sup>41</sup> "Sed si quaeratur, an delectatio libidinosa, quam intendunt vir et uxor absque filiorum generandorum intentione, faciat inter eos esse matrimonium, dicendum est, quod si vir et uxor filiorum generationem non intendunt, sed solum delectationem, vel hoc contingit propter impotentiam, quia forte senes sunt, debiles vel infirmi, ardorem tamen libidinis habent, sed minime possunt generare et hoc contingit propter inordinatam concupiscentiam. Quia multi canino more retro coeuntes et mutato ordine humana propagationis eorum uxoribus abutuntur, ut dicit Augustinus et Gratianus 27, q.1, ex quo sequitur impedimentum prolis generandae, quamvis hoc non intendat. Vel hoc contingit propter affectatam malitiam amborum aut unius ipsorum, quia forte vir semen effundit in terram vel alibi quam loco proprio generationi deputato, sicut fecit filius Iudae, de quo dictum est supra, vel forte ambo, ut eis filii non nascantur, in hac malitia conveniunt. Vel hoc contingit propter promissam nequitiam, quia forte promiserunt venena sterilitatis procurare et prolem conceptam destruere. Primis duobus dictis non intendere generationem prolis non tollit matrimonium quamvis peccatum committatur, quia sicut Augustinus ait et ponitur 32, q.2, sicut habere concubinam causa prolis generandae non facit concubitum esse fornicarium, sed aliis duobus modis coniuges, qui vitant vel nolunt sibi nasci filios vel alio malo opere agunt ne nascantur. Non invenio, dicit Augustinus et ponitur 2, q. supra dicta, quomodo has nuptias appellare possumus, quia iura matrimonii nedum tales servant, sed etiam impediunt." C p. 43-44, B v. 8, p. 110. For more on the Church's teaching on the impediments to marriage, see Z. Maj, "Przeszkody małżeńskie w świetle Kodeksu Prawa Kanonicznego oraz Kodeksu Rodzinnego i Opiekuńczego," *Ius Matrimoniale* 28, no. 3 (2017): 35-60.

<sup>42</sup> K. Knotz, *Akt małżeński* (Kraków: 2001).

avoided. The virgin should be cleanly but modestly dressed.<sup>43</sup> It is not easy to maintain marital purity and modesty. In this regard Benedict Hesse referred to Jerome's writings. In marriage, individuals are called to be concerned about many temporal goods and to the pleasures of marriage. It is understandable that a wife would seek to please her husband. A virgin, on the other hand, belongs to God and strives to maintain chastity (1 Cor 7:34). It is difficult for married women to maintain purity and abstinence because they have become accustomed to beautifying their bodies and returning to youthful pleasures.<sup>44</sup>

Usually women dress up to a greater degree and more frequently than men. Benedict Hesse wrote about women adorning themselves and what they wear. Hesse's judgment on the matter is based on several distinctions. If the woman is single or unmarried, then she should not beautify herself or she would be committing mortal sin. If, however, a

<sup>43</sup> "Item volens tenere castitatem debet vitare vestem superfluas suspectam lecti mollitiae. Unde Gregorius in Homilia de divite epulone: 'Sunt nonnulli, qui cultum subtilium pretiosarumque vestium non putant esse peccatum, quod si culpa non esset, nequaquam sermo Dei id tam vigilanter exprimeret; quod dives, qui torquebatur in inferno bysso et purpura indutus fuisset.' Et de ornatu mulierum singulariter dicit beatus Hieronymus: 'Si vir vel mulier se ornaverit et vultus hominus ad se provocaverit, etsi nullum ide sequatur damnum, iudicium tamen patietur aeternum, quia venenum attulit, si fuisset qui biberet.' Quae verba mitius sunt intelligenda nubentibus et nubere volentibus, quam non nuptii et castitatem servare volentibus, quia ornatus coniugatis permittitur secundum indulgentiam quamvis non secundum imperium. Unde Augustinus in epistola ad Possidium sic inquit: 'Nolo, ut de ornamentis viri vel mulieris perperem habeas in prohibendo sententiam nisi eis, qui neque coniugati neque coniugari cupientes cogitare debent, quomodo placeant Deo'. Sed nonne expedit ex quo tales inter homines debent vivere et volunt honeste vestitos esse? Unde audi Hieronymum ad Nepotianum: 'Vestes foedas seque devita, ut candidae, quia ornatus et sordes pari modo fugiendae sunt, quia unum delicias, alterum humanam gloriam redolet.' Debet ergo tenera virgo medium in vestitu." C p. 405, B v. 16, p. 73.

<sup>44</sup> "Item idem dicit: 'Parcus, cibus et venter semper esuriens triduanis praefertur ieiuniis et multo melius est cottidie parum quam raro satis sumere. Cogita te cottidie morituram et nunquam de secundis nuptiis cogitabis.' De puritate coniugatorum et munditia eorundem advertendum, quod tanto difficilior est eos esse mundos, quanto pluribus curis saecularibus et voluptatibus coniugio adhaerentibus sunt deputati, 'quae enim nupta est, cogitat quae sunt mundi et quomodo viro placeat, Virgo autem, quae sunt Dei, ut sit sancta in spiritu,' 1 Cor. VII. Et heu, coniugati raro ita mundi sunt, ut deberent, consueverunt enim se fucare et delectationes iuvenum suscitare. Unde Hieronymus in quadam epistola: 'Quid facit in facie, o Christiane, purissimus et cerussa, quorum alterum ruborem genarum laborumque Vincitur, alterum candorem colli, ornatus iste non Dei est, sed velamen antichristi qua fiducia vultum ad caelum erigit, quam creator non agnoscit.'" C p. 406, B v. 16, p. 75.

woman is married and fulfills all her marital duties, then she should follow the local customs in dress so as not to expose herself to derision. In this case, she does not sin because she strives to please her husband (1 Cor 7:34).<sup>45</sup> Hesse's judgment of the desire to dress up, especially among women, is rather strict and outdated. It is important to note, however, it was not that long ago that the Holy See published instruction regarding modest Christian dress.<sup>46</sup>

The second distinction that Hesse made is the purpose of dressing up. If a woman dresses up in order to incline a man to debauchery or lust, then she clearly commits a mortal sin (Prov 7:10). Master Benedict quoted Chrysostom in this instance. If a woman adorns herself in order to attract a man's gaze, then she sins because she has prepared a poison, even if the man does not drink it. If, however, a woman dresses up only out of vanity or recklessness and without perverse intentions, then she does not commit a grave sin. Sometimes dressing up is even necessary. In the case that a woman loses her hair or is disfigured by disease, then she should hide her ugliness by adorning her head accordingly so as not to disrespect men. Her actions are dictated by respect and not by licentiousness or luxury. Everything mentioned above also applies to men.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> "Ad tertium est dicendum, quod de ornatu mulieris multiplex distinctio est necessaria. Prima ex parte status, si enim aliquae sunt, quae nec viros habent, nec sunt in statu in quo habere possint, absque gravi peccato se ornare non possunt, ut virorum aspectibus placeant. Sed si sunt in statu coniugali, vel quod viros habere intendant, dare operam, ut non habeantur in contemptu in statu, in quo sunt considerata consuetudine statu primo et moribus patriae non aliud versetur, in intentione videtur posse fieri sine peccato, quia Apostolus dicit: 'Mulier nupta cogitat, qualiter placeat viro.'" C p. 460, B v. 16, p. 171.

<sup>46</sup> See D. Olewinski, "Czy ubiór może być grzeszny?," *Teolog Katolicki Odpowiada*, 17 marca 2021, accessed April 7, 2021, <https://teologkatolicki.blogspot.com/2019/02/czy-nieskromny-ubior-jest-grzeszny.html>; Pius XI, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol 22 (Rome: Typis Polyglot Vaticanis, 1980), <http://www.vatican.va/archive/aas/documents/AAS-22-1930-ocr.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> "Secunda est necessaria ex parte finis, quia si tale ornamentum fiet, ut homines trahantur ad luxuriam et ut concupiscentur modo, quo dicitur Prov. VII: 'Occurrit iuveni mulier ornatu meretricio, parata ad decipiendas animas,' sine peccato mortali esse non potest, dato etiam, quod nullum decipiant. Unde dicit Chrysostomus: 'Si aliquae mulieres ornando se oculos hominum attraxerit ad se, etiamsi visu plagas non intulerint, poenam patientur extremam, quia venenum confecerunt, etiamsi nullus fuerit, qui biberit.' Sed si ex aliqua levitate vel vanitate, non habendo illam pravam intentionem superius dictam, grave esset dictum, quod superesset peccatum mortale, hoc idem puto esse dicendum de capillis extraneis et fictis coloribus, quia cum turpe sit mulierem sine capillis esse, si ex aliqua infirmitate vel accidenti his careat et ut talem turpitudinem occultet et a viris earum non despiciantur, puto quod mortaliter non peccarent



## Castration and Abstinence

Benedict Hesse also raised the question of castration, which he believed is connected to conjugal abstinence. While he brought up this issue in his commentary on Matthew 5:27-30, he focused on it primarily in his commentary on Matthew 19:10-12. In this passage, Jesus speaks about eunuchs who are unfit to marry for various reasons. Some people are eunuchs from birth and others have made themselves eunuchs while having carnal desires within their hearts. Such individuals are not worthy of praise. In this regard, Hesse quoted Jerome, who stated that monks who simulate purity but who are hypocrites because they fantasize about impure pleasures belong to this infamous group. There are also those who choose to be chaste for the Kingdom of Heaven, and they are, indeed, such.<sup>48</sup> They were victorious concerning what is good because they had righteous and honest intentions. It is commendable to abstain from lust by an act of the will.<sup>49</sup> Christ did not say that a person should castrate himself, but rather that he should abstain from all evil and impure thoughts. Cutting off one's members does not prevent temptations or provide peace by protecting against

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se ornando, ex quo non propter lasciviam et luxuriam hoc faciunt, et in omnibus, ut dictum est de mulieribus, intelligendum est et de viris." C p. 460, B v. 16, p. 171-172.

<sup>48</sup> "Sunt enim eunuchi, id est continentes, Et est graecum vocabulum secundum Isidorum: qui sic nati sunt sine instrumentis sive frigidae naturae, qui proprie dicuntur castrati, quasi caste nati, 'Et sunt eunuchi, qui facti sunt ab hominibus,' quibus secantur genitalia, qui proprie dicuntur spadones a spata genere ferri, quo eunuchisantur. Unde Eccl. 2: 'Concupiscentia spadonis devirginat iuenculam,' Et istae duae non sunt laudabiles et nec meritorie nec demeritorie, quia necessitate fuerint, non voluntate, nec in quantum per voluntatem acceptantur. Secundum Hieronymum inter hoc computantur et hi, qui specie religionis simulant castitatem, scilicet hypocritae et appetentes vanam gloriam ab omnibus ex quocumque suo opere. 'Et sunt eunuchi,' id est continentes, 'qui seipsos castraverunt propter regnum caelorum,' qui proprie dicuntur eunuchi, id est bene viventes, ab 'eu,' quod est bonum, et 'nuchos,' quod est victoria, quasi boni victores." E p. 213, B v. 26, p. 158.

<sup>49</sup> "Et hi merentur et ratione voluntatis, quia spontanea, et ratione actionis, quia bona, et ratione intentionis, quia recta. Ista enim tria perficiunt meritum. Isaiae, 56: 'Haec dicit Dominus Deus: eunuchis, qui custodierunt sabbata mea, etc, dabo eis in domo mea et in muris meis locum et nomen melius a filiis et filiabus.' Ex hac auctoritate videtur, quod aureole sit quaedam fama vel quidam honor amplius aliis. Haec ergo tertia continentia, quae est per voluntatem reprimentem concupiscentiam ab actu venereo victoriosa dicitur et laudabilis et sola est meritoria. Unde Chrysostomus: 'Illa est gloriosa continentia non quam transgredi non potest necessitas debilitati corporis, sed quam complectitur voluntas sancti propositi.'" E p. 213, B v. 26, p. 158-159.

concupiscence. God values the state of chastity more; however, since not everyone can attain it, the Savior encouraged His disciples (warriors): “Whoever can accept this ought to accept it.” Whoever can fight against the flesh must fight until he is victorious and triumphs. Hesse thought that Jesus was encouraging (but not commanding) His followers to practice heroic abstinence here. In this way, chastity is not a commandment but a counsel given to every person; although, not everyone understands and accepts it.<sup>50</sup> Virginitas is voluntary and is not necessary for salvation. He who can be abstinent should be.<sup>51</sup>

Throughout history castrated men have played an important role in society, serving in the courts of rulers, in the Christian world, and even in the Vatican.<sup>52</sup> Most of these men, however, did not harm themselves voluntarily. Often they were harmed due to violence, slavery, or servitude. In the course of history, some boys were castrated at a young age so that they would be unable to marry and, therefore, useful as eunuchs. Today such practices are forbidden in the civilized world.

Benedict Hesse thought that castrating oneself for the Kingdom of Heaven, meaning for religious reasons, was wicked. While it is true that a man without male his member cannot rape a woman and, thereby, can save his life or avoid the threat of death,<sup>53</sup> God gave man a body,

<sup>50</sup> It is generally believed that Origen took Christ’s counsel too literally and castrated himself. However, he was not opposed to the institution of the sacrament of marriage. M. Szram, “Autokastracja Orygeneses – fakt czy nieporozumienie?” *Vox Patrum* 23, nos. 44-45 (2003): 171-202.

<sup>51</sup> “Et iterum, cum dicit: ‘Qui se castraverunt,’ non membrorum dicit abscisionem, sed malarum cogitationum interemptionem. Etenim concupiscentia habet fontes praecipue a proposito incontinente et mente negligente. Et si ipsa sobria fuerit naturalium motuum, nullum est nocumentum. Nec ita abscisio membri comprimit tentationes et tranquillitates facit ut cogitationes frenum. Sed quia status talis altus est, nec possunt omnes ad hoc attingere, sed solum perfecti, ideo infert Dominus hortando milites suos, dicens: ‘Qui potest capere, capiat’ cum adiutorio Dei, ut sit castus, vel ut intelligat quae dico, vel qui potest pugnare, contra carnem pugnet ac superet et triumphet, Et est vox hortantis ad continentiae bravium, non iubentis. Quasi diceret: unusquisque consideret, an virginitatis et pudicitiae praecepta implere queat, tantum bonum non est necessitatis, sed supererogationis, nec est hoc praeceptum, sed consilium, cui libet offertur, sed nemini imponitur. Qui potest continere, contineat.” E p. 213, B v. 26, p. 159.

<sup>52</sup> O. de Marliave, *Historia eunuchów* (Warszawa: 2012).

<sup>53</sup> “Ad primam est dicendum, quod secundum Augustinum, 1 De civitate Dei, absque speciali consilio Spiritus Sancti non licet alicui facere. Unde sequatur mors sua vel alterius. Unde deberet virgo suum corruptorem interficere, quantumcumque dubitaret de sui consensus complacentia in ipsa experientia operis fornicarii; quia igitur abscisio membrorum virilium absque periculo mortis fieri non potest, ideo tamquam homicida habendus est et maledictione homicidii

and every one of its members is good and necessary. Christ's command, however, refers only to overcoming evil and lustful thoughts.<sup>54</sup> Hesse referred to St. John Chrysostom, who argued that a man becomes worse through castration because his sperm (*sperma*) have no outlet. The members of the body become impure only through concupiscent movements of the will.<sup>55</sup>

A person can become a castrate in four ways: firstly, through violence perpetrated by others (e.g., by barbarians or by masters of slaves); secondly, through illness or bodily weakness; thirdly, through a birth defect; and fourthly, through harming oneself after taking the advice of idiotic people who believe that a lack of testicles protects a man from

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obnoxius, qui membra sua abscidit, ut dicit Chrysostomus super hunc locum. Et dico absque consilio speciali Spiritus Sancti, quia secundum Augustinum aliter non excusaretur ab homicidio Samson et Jephthe, qui filiam immolavit, nisi quia singulari consilio Spiritus Sancti fecerunt, et quaecumque aliae personae hoc fecerunt, sicut dicit Augustinus, quod Romae quaedam virgines videntes eorum corruptores, seipsas in flumen rapidissimum iactaverunt sed quaedam domina Lucretia nomine, cum esset violenter oppressa in tantum fornicationis actum est detestata et de fractione fidei matrimonialis copulae conturbata, quod statim negotio iudicata viro et cuidam nepoti potentibus in actu bellico, ut vindictam facerent, seipsam interfecit. Aliter tales et consimiles excusari non debent ab homicidii crimine, nisi si forte revelatione Spiritus Sancti talia fecerunt." E p. 214, B v. 26.

<sup>54</sup> "Cum igitur Salvator dicit, quod aliqui se castraverunt propter regnum caelorum, intelligendum est secundum Chrysostomum talem castrationem fiendam esse non per membrorum virili un abscisionem, quia sexus, cum sit natura a Deo facta, bonus est. Sed intelligitur propter malarum cogitationum et malarum concupiscentiarum interfectionem, si enim voluntas nostra est sobria et pudica, motus naturalium membrorum nullum est peccatum." E p. 214, B v. 26.

<sup>55</sup> "Ad sextam est dicendum, quod hanc dubitationem determinat Chrysostomum super illo verbo Mt. XIX: "Sunt eunuchi, qui seipsos castraverunt propter regnum caelorum" dicens: 'Non est intelligendum propter abscisionem membrorum, sed propter interemptionem et interfectionem malarum cogitationum eunuchos regnum caelorum esse consecutos, quia maledictioni est obnoxius, qui membrum sibi abscidit et qui homicida talis esse praesumit,' nam si dictum est: 'Non occides hominem, procul dubio qui seipsum, nihil aliud quam hominem occidit. Et subdit, quod neque concupiscentia fit melior aut mansuetior per abscisionem membri, quia molestior, quia sperma, quod in nobis est, aliunde habet fontes. Mens ergo nostra sit sobria, quod si ipsa voluntas sit continens macularium muabilem motuum, nullum est nocumentum, non enim membra nostra sunt impudica, nisi propter impudicam voluntatem. Unde si adducerentur ante iudicem et diceret iudex membrum nostris: 'Quare talia fecistis?', responderent: 'Propter voluntatem, quam nobis consituisti dominam et principem, ut in omnibus sibi oboedireremus,' et sic essent excusata." C p. 462, B v.16, p. 172-173.

lust.<sup>56</sup> The first three causes of castration are not an issue; the fourth, however, is an irregular situation because it arises from a diabolical temptation. In this situation, lust does not decrease but increases. A man who cuts off a part of his manhood is unable to fulfill the essential obligations of marriage nor can he be admitted to the priesthood.<sup>57</sup>

Benedict Hesse mentioned Origen, who likely underwent castration not to maintain abstinence but to avoid suspicion and disgrace. As a castrated man, he could teach both women and men secretly during the persecution of the Church.<sup>58</sup> According to Hesse, castration is forbidden and is sinful in every instance, since the person who permits it becomes God's enemy and commits a particular type of murder.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> "Ad secundam dicendum, quod sicut sub dicto capitulo eunuchus quattuor modis potest aliquos castrari. Primo per violentiam et coactionem: sic illi, qui castrantur a suis dominis vel a barbaris, quando capiuntur ab eis. Secundo per infirmitatem et corporis languorem. Tertio per naturam et suam generationem: sic enim homo, quando nascitur sine digittis et cum diminutione aliorum membrorum. Ita dicente Salvatore 'aliqui sunt eunuchi, qui de utero matris sic nati sunt.' Quarto per propriam operationem, credens enim aliquis stultus carere concupiscentiam carnali abscisis membris virilibus." E p. 214, B v. 26, p. 160.

<sup>57</sup> "Sed secundum Chrysostomum, qui dicit super hunc locum: 'Abscidere membra genitalia causa continentiae diabolicae tentationis est, quia per hoc non fit concupiscentia mansuetior, sed molestior et ardentior; aliunde enim, ut ait, sperma et semen habet suos fontes in nobis. Primis ergo tribus modis non incurritur irregularitas, sed quarto modo solum, ut dicit distinctio supradicta, si quis seipsum abscidit et virilia sibi amputat, non fiat clericus, qui sui est homicida et Dei conditionis inimicus, et hoc intelligitur, quod non fiat sine dispensatione.'" E p. 214, B v. 26, p. 160.

<sup>58</sup> "Item Origenes legitur hoc fecisse de seipso non propter continentiam, sed propter vitandam infamiam et malam suspensionem, ut posset libere in occulto predicare tam mulieribus quam viris, sicut dicitur sexto libro Ecclesiasticae historiae tempore persecutionis ecclesiae." E p. 215, B v. 26, p. 160.

<sup>59</sup> "Sed ad oppositum, quod nullo modo sit faciendum, habetur in canone, dist. LV: 'Si quis absciderit sibi virilia, non fiat clericus, quia sui est homicida et Dei conditionis est inimicus.' Si quis tamen clericus fuerit et absciderit semetipsum, omnino damnetur, quia sui homicida est, hoc est fecit tale quid. Ad primum: illa auctoritas non intelligitur de membrorum abscisione, sed nomine membrorum corporis vocantur amici necessarii, qui quantumcumque sint familiares speciales vel necessarii et alliciant ad peccandum, proiciendi sunt a familiaritate nostra. Ad secundum: neganda est consequentia, quia salus mentis non posset praeter talium abscisionem praeparari; immo maius meritum praestat, si per rationem eorum passiones virtuosae domentur. Ad tertium de Origene: mirae devotionis actus fuit, nec fuit propter hoc impeditus, ne esset sacerdos ordinatus, sicut nominat Glossa distinctionis LV 'Si quis absciderit.' Sed factum suum non est trahendum in consequentiam, tales enim decipiuntur et retorquent in facto suo necessitatem peccandi in Deum, naturae suae conditorem." E p. 215, B v. 26, p. 160-161.

A person can neither act against the members of his body, which are called his friends, nor does such conduct serve the salvation of man.

## Conclusion

Dogmatic  
Theology

The issues concerning chastity and conjugal abstinence that Hesse raises can appear silly to the modern reader, since they seem almost anecdotal and basic. Hesse's writings are not a complete and exhaustive lecture on conjugal abstinence; they are casuistic and legal. This is particularly evident when one compares Hesse's writings to extensive contemporary studies on this issue. Nevertheless, studies must take into account the cultural and historical context of chastity and conjugal abstinence. Based on Hesse's writings, he did not want to delve more deeply into a subject matter that had already been discussed thoroughly in the preaching and casuistry of the Middle Ages.<sup>60</sup> During this era, love was understood in a way that was often contrary to marriage and Christianity. The troubadours propagated the romantic idea of love, a prime example of which is the medieval poem "Roman de la Rose."<sup>61</sup> The knightly ethos was characterized by free courtly love.<sup>62</sup> Undoubtedly, at that time it was difficult to write positively and theologically by bringing together love, chastity, abstinence, and marriage. It was not until the twentieth century that a decisive breakthrough occurred in this field.

### Abbreviations for citations from Benedict Hesse's *Lectura cum dubitationibus super Evangelium sancti Matthaei* [Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew]:

- C – Hesse de Cracovia, Benedicti. *Lectura cum dubitationibus super Evangelium sancti Matthaei, pars I cum textu, capitula I – VIII*, Biblioteka Jagiellońska BJ 1365.
- D – Hesse de Cracovia, Benedicti. *Lectura cum dubitationibus super Evangelium sancti Matthaei, pars II cum textu, capitula IX – XVI*, Biblioteka Jagiellońska BJ 1364.

<sup>60</sup> G. Duby, *Rycerz, kobieta i ksiądz. Matężństwo w feudalnej Francji* (Warszawa: 1986); J. Delumeau, *Grzech i strach, Poczucie winy w kulturze Zachodu XIII-XVIII w.* (Warszawa: 1994), 303-316.

<sup>61</sup> G. Mathon, *Le mariage des chrétiens, t. 1: Des origine au concile de Trente* (Paris: 1993), 278-298.

<sup>62</sup> D. Piwowarczyk, *Obyczajrycerski w Polsce późnośredniowiecznej (XIV-XV wiek)* (Warszawa: 1998), 184-226.

- E – Hesse de Cracovia, Benedicti. *Lectura cum dubitationibus super Evangelium sancti Matthaei, pars III cum textu, capitula XVII – XXV*, Biblioteka Jagiellońska BJ 1366.
- F – Hesse de Cracovia, Benedicti. *Lectura cum dubitationibus super Evangelium sancti Matthaei, pars IV cum textu, capitula XXVI – XXVIII*, Biblioteka Jagiellońska BJ 1368.  
The letter “p.” indicates “pagina,” or page number.
- B – The source edition of W. Bucichowski’s commentary on Hesse’s work is: Benedicti Hesse, *Lectura cum dubitationibus super Evangelium sancti Matthaei*. Edited by W. Bucichowski. Warszawa: 1979.  
Note: The letter “v.” indicates the volume number in the series *Textus et studia*, while the letter “p.” indicates the page number.

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