# Conversation Contours on Spirituality of Apostolic Singleness

Viv Grigg, Nov 2011

There are some things in life not worth the effort. Is this defining our identity as single persons one of them? Or is this the context of our deepest levels of intimacy with God? Is this a place of great trauma or is it a place of the depths of the cross and resurrection, and hence of great spiritual authority and lovingness?

Handling singleness is a big issue in any culture and there are plenty of websites for debate on the issues. This particular discussion is focused on conversation as to the development of a healthy spirituality of *apostolic* singleness. It presumes a prior commitment to following the Christ of the poor, the boundary-crossing Christ, who brings love and reconciliation.

It falls within that aspect of spirituality which has to do with knowing and disciplining our own spirits. And from that knowledge either invoking or perhaps hindering the presence of the Holy Spirit, the comforter, companion, guide.

Illich in a singular article has defined apostolic spirituality (Illich c2006)).

### Varieties of status

How does this celibate or single spirituality differ between those who are single and those who are married?

And within the cluster of those apostolates that include singles, how does it differ for those choosing singleness, the voluntarily celibate, those faced with involuntary singleness as young people, and those facing widowhood or divorce. It is offensive to make blanket statements about large categories. It is wiser to try to refine and identify where each person we converse with dwells.

*Fig 1: Types of Apostolic Singleness*

Of course one can break these down into male and female giving us 8 different personhoods to consider, each with nuances of identity that can both include deep trauma, and if fully reconciled, can include the heights of the knowledge of God. Mastery of this arena of spirituality, is central to the search for sainthood!

*Fig 2: Extended Categories of Apostolic Singleness*

Of course, the conversation can begin by dividing the discussion into male and female *identities* and then doing a breakdown within those categories of specific male and female *issues* derived from those. Both approaches are necessary to understand the pastoral issues and spiritual formation for those involved in the apostolate.

### The chaos of post-Christendom and Postmodern mores

But this nice breakdown gets confused when we face the issue of (potential) transition to marriage. Such a transition is confused - by passion in conflict with tradition - within a traditional culture where the processes are clear. It is doubly confused with apostolic outsiders (missionaries) who come from a culture in significant implosion, where neither processes nor morality have any clarity, as they enter cultures where there are well defined moral boundaries. Many young emergent apostles find themselves swimming in a sea of confusion and conflicting claims with neither cultural guidelines nor Biblical teaching on progressions. They are commonly the products of a culture in subtle rebellion. They have been rescued by the cross from their teenage years of drunken immorality and context of absent fatherhood, but are scarred still by both the rebellion, the absence of fatherhood, and the subterranean passions and memories.

But a new standard is needed. Transitional spirituality for singleness according to 1 Thes 4:3-5 involves:

* Honour: Communal and cultural accountability in stages of courtship and marriage.
* Holiness: Purity before God in each step of these processes.

### Community and Structure

We need to examine these dynamics within the contexts of both the apostolic community and in light of apostolic leadership roles as well as within the context of both the host community and the sending community.

*Fig 3: Contours of Transitional Singleness Spirituality*

But returning to the discussion on the pre-transition state of singleness, and having identified (1) personhood and (2) identity within (3) vocational categories, we then need to look at five elements of functional spirituality and apply principles related to those five to each of the above categories of personhood.

Subsumed under each of these contexts of identity is the historical conflicts of spirituality:

1. Passion for God vs. uncontrolled passions
2. Loneliness vs. intimacy vs. community
3. Affirming a gift vs curse
4. Limitations vs freedom, subsuming issues of:
   1. modesty of person.
   2. protection from compromising situations.
5. Finding healthy culturally acceptable roles vs. despised roles.

These five conflicts need to be considered in terms of:

* the disciplines of daily struggle.
* the spiritual journey to long-term maturity, wholeness, fulfillment and health.
* the long-term journey dynamics are complicated by the physiological changes that occur at various stages of one’s journey.

*Fig 4: Five Inner Conflicts*

### The Questions of Voluntary Singleness.

This is the easiest of the above categories to resolve in a progress towards fulfillment, because it is one that must significantly be entered into. But it is a horrific choice, a facing of the cross in all its rugged beauty and pain

Chosen singleness for a period may be a great asset for the advancement of the Kingdom. But there are dangers in lifetime vows of celibacy. As Protestants, we have no commitment to lifelong vows of celibacy. Luther clearly demonstrated these as neither Biblical, wise nor healthy (Grigg 1986).

Read the section in the *Lifestyle and Values* on Singleness and on *Celibacy* in Illich.

### Motivations: Love for God

Matt 22:37-39 indicates that the primary goal is loving God.

Rev 2:6 repeats this priority on a love for God.

Some of us are called to singleness for the sake of this love.

### Sustaining Purity

Within the above framework is the call to purity. We are told in I John that we are to walk in victory and we are to walk in the light. Most reading this are doing neither, have come out of darkness, yet the darkness continues in various ways. You are afraid of the light, afraid of what others will think of you. So you live in a hidden culture of murkiness. Impure, partly forgiving your own self, hence not seeing God.

Discussion: what accountabilities are needed? What is walking in the light?

### Contentment

In Phil 4:11-13, Paul says I have learned to be content. In 1 Tim 6:6-8 he speaks (of simplicity) that there is great gain in godliness with contentment.

### Drawing Strength

* From friendships
* From devotions
* From loving a wider cluster
* Guarding your heart

### Challenges of Singleness

* Dealing with Expectations
* Transiency of relationships
* Wrestling with God
* Loneliness

### Discussion Questions

* A gift or a curse?
  + How do you deal with singleness now?
  + What will you need to do to guard your heart?
  + What will you need to uphold your covenant to celibacy?
* Review the section in *the Lifestyle and Values* on commitments to Singleness and discuss.
* Discuss why involuntary poverty carries a greater probability of not leading to fulfillment and joy.
* Collectively decide on what protections you can put in place as cross-cultural teams that will sustain holiness and honor in your time as a single person on the field.

### Sources

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