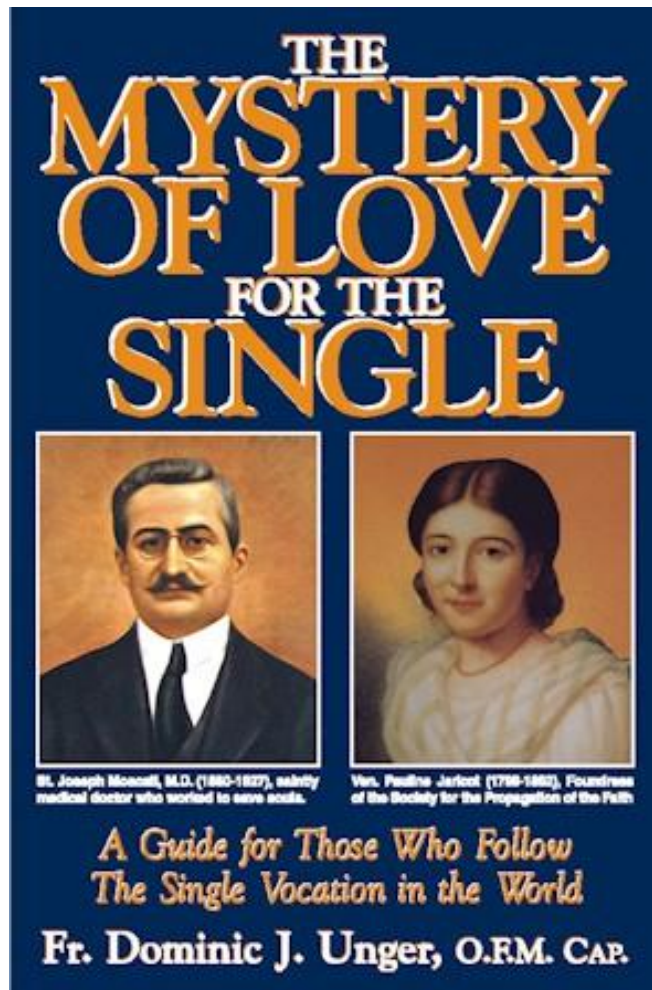


A Summary of *The Mystery of Love for the Single* by Fr. Dominic Unger



The Mystery of Love for the Single: A Guide for Those Who Follow The Single Vocation In the World, by Fr. Dominic J. Unger, O.F.M. Cap.

Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 2005

ISBN: 0-89555-824-6

Summary by Theresa English, written exclusively for The Goldhead Group, Ltd.

[You can purchase the full text on Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

About the Author

Father Dominic Unger (1907-1982) was born in Kansas, joined the Capuchins in Pennsylvania and was ordained in 1934. He studied at the Gregorian University in Rome and, returning to the United States, taught Theology and Sacred Scripture. He spent time in research, writing and pastoral work. He was fluent in 14 languages. Before the Second Vatican Council, he served as a consultant for the Theological Commission. After the Council, he wrote against abuses resulting from it.

General Overview

The Mystery of Love is written for those who follow the vocation of consecrated lay celibacy in the world. What does that vocation mean? Is it valid? For whom is it? How is the consecrated person to preserve his or her purity? Drawing from the wisdom of the Church Fathers, the saints, and especially from Pope Pius XII's *On Holy Virginity*, Father Unger elaborates on the beauty and dignity of consecrated virginity.

Chapter One: The Mystery of God's Love for Man

"God is love, and [...] the mystery of love is at the very heart of the divine life of the Trinity" (14). God created us to share Himself with us. Out of love, He calls us to the happiness of heaven. God's love is poured out on us *through* Jesus. In love, He gave us the infallible Church and the Sacraments. "Most of all, however, [Jesus] manifests His love for us in the Sacrament of His love, Holy Communion" (20).

Chapter Two: The Mystery of Man's Love for God

Since man was created to enjoy God in heaven, all his bodily and spiritual faculties must help him achieve that goal. Men must also help each other. One way of doing this is in marriage, where man and woman cooperate with God in bringing forth more people for the Church and for heaven. There are also those consecrated souls, such as priest, religious, and laymen, who "dedicate themselves to service of Christ and His Church in perfect chastity" (27).

Chapter Three: The Single Vocation in the World

Fr. Unger undertakes an apology of the single vocation. Jesus and St. Paul recommended it. The Church has always upheld it and has canonized many virgins. The then-current pope, Pius XII, approved of and praised it.

Furthermore, the virginal vocation is "in complete accord with right reason" (33). Those who are unfit, by virtue of illness, character, etc., for marriage or the priesthood "should consider it God's will that they live a single life in the world devoted to works of charity" (34). Those who give up sexual intercourse, even though capable of it, also choose well. After all, there are enough other people marrying to ensure the race's continuation. Nor is abstinence from sex unhealthy; one needs God, not sex.

Perfect chastity is actually good for one because it helps one love God wholeheartedly. Those who live it do great good for the Church. Their vocation in no way detracts from the priesthood or religious life but serves to inspire others to those vocations.

Chapter Four: Spiritual Nuptials through Perfect Chastity

"Virginal love is mystical union with Christ" (41). It is marriage with Christ. As married people surrender their bodies to each other, so a consecrated person surrenders his soul to Christ and Christ gives himself to the soul.

The Bible is full of wedding imagery: especially the Canticle, Ephesians 5, and Apocalypse 19 & 21. Israel and the Church are both referred to as God's bride. The Church looks on religious men and women as Christ's bride.

“Virginal love seals the heart of the lover for Christ alone.” (47) The virgin can love Christ with undivided zeal. This is a marriage bond that death will only make stronger. In *On Holy Virginity*, Pius XII has given “another reason for choosing a life of perfect and virginal chastity: likeness to Christ” (50).

There are four symbols of espousal with Christ that Fr. Unger considers. The dress, symbol of a new status; the veil, symbol of “exclusive love for one man” (53); the ring, which the ceremony for the blessing and consecration of virgins speaks of as a symbol of fidelity; and finally the wreath, “symbol of excellence, of dignity, of power, of glory and honor, of reward” (55).

Chapter Five: The Manner of Dedication

In this very short chapter, we look at the “various degrees” (58) of consecration. One may make a promise, the breaking of which is no sin. Or one may make a vow, which to break would be a sin. It is wise to take temporary vows first, moving gradually towards a permanent vow.

Fr. Unger stresses that this vocation is something separate from married or religious life. Also, those who have chosen this way of life would benefit by getting together “for mutual encouragement and help” (62).

Chapter Six: Perfect Chastity a Boon for Church and Society

Those who have chosen the life of perfect chastity in the world should influence society by their good example, by their prayer and sacrifice, and by “*social charity* according to their ability and interests” (67). They have more time for social work than those who are married and more freedom and access to the secular realm than a religious person. The love of Christ is fruitful in the virgin's life; he or she has a spiritual parenthood. Leading people to heaven is every Catholic's obligation, and the virgin fulfills it in a special way. Lastly, Fr. Unger gives a few examples of apostolate, such as education and secretarial work.

Chapter Seven: Careers and Home Life

The virgin is offered some practical principles in regard to a career choice. First, one's career should provide one with a living wage and pension. Second, it should be one within the scope of one's talents and education. It should not endanger chastity. It may offer one the chance of bettering society. Some suggestions on *how* to work: “First, love the work of your apostolate and career” (74). Don't just put up with it. Also, be patient, humble, unselfish, and dedicated. Rest and take vacations.

A suitable living arrangement is more difficult for women to find than men. The virgin may live on his own, with his family, or with others in the same vocation. Without exception, men and women should not live together.

Chapter Eight: The Excellence and Fruits of Perfect Chastity

Virginity is a treasure, a gift from Christ. “Christ's bride shares in His dignity and in His treasures” (79). He loves them in a special way and gives them special graces. “He protects them, consoles them, helps them, rejoices their hearts” (81). These brides of Christ share in His sufferings, too. They enjoy spiritual intimacy with Christ and some, such as St. Margaret Mary, have excelled in contemplation. Jesus “lives for the virgin bride, and she lives for Him” (83).

Chastity helps one to practice charity and to master one's passions. Virginity is a type of martyrdom, as some saints have said.

After quoting a handful of Church worthies, Fr. Unger concludes that the virginal life is heavenly because it "permits one to realize already in this life what is essentially the supreme vocation and goal of every intelligent creature: union with Christ in heaven" (90). Heaven will be full of exceptional happiness for the virgin. Glorious privileges await; the virgin can look forward to death joyfully.

Tradition calls perfect chastity beautiful. "[E]very bride of Jesus is adorned with the sun of His good grace; she is crowned with the glory and honor of all her good works. She, in other words, shares in the beauty of Mary and the Church" (98). Virginity reflects God's glory.

Chapter Nine: For Whom is this Vocation?

One must be called to this life by God. One must choose it freely and for the proper motives such as love for Christ and neighbor. "One may *not* choose to live the single life merely because one has a false notion that marriage is a necessary evil" (101).

When discerning, one should take one's age into consideration, think about it, pray, sacrifice, talk to one's spiritual director, "live more and more in communion with Christ," and "improve [one's] character" (103-104).

This vocation may be chosen by normal people, by people unfit for the other vocations, by widows – Fr. Unger spends much time on widows –, by people married but separate, or by repentant sinners.

Chapter Ten: Jesus and Mary and Virginal Chastity

Jesus Christ "lived a life of perfect chastity, and lived it with the greatest possible perfection...He is the King of Virgins" (109). Many of those "in closest relation to the essential mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption" (111) were virgins: St. Joseph, St. John, His herald, St. John the Apostle, and, by special favor, His mother. Mary is the "Queen of Virgins," "the teacher and model of all virgins," and the fruitful "Virgin Mother" (114).

Chapter Eleven: Virginal Chastity and the Virginal Church

Tradition teaches that the marriage of Christ and His Church, in a way, took place at the Incarnation. It was foreshadowed in several ways: by the marriage of the first man and woman, throughout the Old Testament where Israel is spoken of as bride, and in the wedding imagery of the New Testament (Mk. 2, Mt. 25, Rev. 12, 19, 21). "With this basis in Scripture, it is not surprising that the Church Fathers should have developed the doctrine of the Church's being not only our Mother but our Virgin Mother and Christ's Bride" (118-119). Father then cites several Church Fathers, for example, St. Methodius who speaks of the fruitfulness of the virgin Church.

Again quoting from the saints, Father reaffirms that virgins pattern their virgin life after the Church, receive strength for their vocation from her and her Spouse, and reflect in their lives the virginal and fruitful status of Holy Mother Church.

Chapter Twelve: History of Virginal Living in the Church

Early Christian writings attest that the virginal vocation has existed for as long as the Church herself. In this chapter, Fr. Unger goes through the centuries and lists notable treatises and apologies on virginity, showing how the saints from Paul to Aquinas emulated it. Then he speaks more specifically on the history of virginity.

In the early centuries, virgins lived with their families, shunned the public baths, and engaged in charity work. Many of them, such as St. Agnes, were martyrs. “During the fourth century, the ecclesiastical institution of virginity reached its height” (133). A consecrated virgin was obliged to follow certain rules and was “given a place of honor in church assemblies” (133). The virginal vocation was highly regarded until the age of Humanism. But recently virginal life is making a comeback, encouraged by the definition of the Immaculate Conception and the lives of admirable Christians such as Maria Goretti.

Chapter Thirteen: Chastity and Modesty

“A fundamental principle for safeguarding purity is to know precisely what purity is and what are sins against it.” (138) So then, “Chastity may be defined as the natural and supernatural habit that regulates, according to right reason and faith, the sentient appetite in the use of the sex powers and in the enjoyment of the sexual pleasures” (139).

Virginal chastity consists of, first, “carnal integrity” (140) which is lost through voluntary loss of virginity. Second, virginal chastity involves “the firm resolve of perpetual perfect chastity,” (140) which is lost either by consummating or intending to consummate a marriage or by mortally impure thoughts.

Modesty is the avoidance of anything that causes sexual arousal whether in “sight, touch, speech, [or] reading” (142). A “well-balanced attitude” and a “clear knowledge” (143) of the licit and illicit is advised.

Sins known as impure thoughts are classified and discussed. Father gives valid reasons for thinking about sex, such as the profession of doctor requires it. One should be prompt but calm in rejecting impure thoughts.

Chapter Fourteen: Some Basic Helps in Safeguarding Purity

Be ready! Temptation *will* come.

The first of all of the helps is grace. “Grace, God’s supernatural help, is the indispensable means for avoiding sins of impurity” (151). Pray often, both when suffering and when free from temptation. Prayer should be the virgin’s joy. She should have a “planned program of prayer” (152). The virgin should be devoted to the Holy Spirit whose temple she is.

Flight from temptation is good. Mental substitution, the replacing of an impure thought with an innocent thought, is one form of flight. Here, Father warns against fretting over temptation.

Self-denial is vital and must spring from love of purity. Father specifically suggests sacrifice relating to food and drink as well as increased reception of the Sacrament of Confession. Mary, model and mediatrix, will assist the virgin, as will one’s guardian angel. Another “very power means of preserving chastity and of perfecting it is to have a high ideal of this virtue,” (163) and to mind one’s small sins. Powerful motives, both positive like consecration and negative such as the fear of hell, help.

“The faculty of loving someone is God-given and is essential to a human heart” (166). Love Christ! The Eucharist is a font of grace, but it is especially the moment when the virgin bride is united to her Spouse. “How can Communion not be the divinely instituted instrument for perfecting consecrated chastity and love?” (170)

Chapter Fifteen: Social Life and Friendships

Is friendship between a consecrated virgin and one of the opposite sex possible? This is the main question of this chapter. Friendship is defined as “mutual benevolence and beneficence” (173). Father distinguishes between spiritual friendship and sentient friendship. They exist together easily. Sentient love is morally neutral but is linked to sexual pleasure; therein is the danger. When the danger to chastity is “proximate” – as opposed to “remote” – the friendship should be broken off (180). Scandal must be avoided.

The book closes with a virgin’s prayer of gratitude and petition. “Great Jesus, lover of my poor self, grant me the courage to live that I may be worthy of the great dignity You have bestowed on me of being Your very spouse” (184-5).