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MARRIAGE AND CELIBACY_RIVALS OR
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Day promotes consecrated vocations by providing young Catholics with a joyful experience of living the evangelical counsels. 411 [Marriage and Celibacy: Rivals or Complements?](#) Benny Phang OCarm works from an insight from John Paul II's Theology of the Body to see the complementarity of the vocations of marriage and celibacy rather than viewing them as rivals. departments ~, ~ ~ 427 [Scripture Scope: Praying the Psalms with an Elephant in the Room](#) 432 Book Reviews 443 2009 Index 339 BENNY PHANG Marriage and Celibacy: Rivals or Complements? MMarirsiaugnedardenrdstacendibinacgyaabreouotfttehesseentwaos voonctraatrioens.s still exists among many people who do not fully understand celibacy [for the sake of the kingdom of heaven](#) or [the meaning of](#) marriage. They see marriage as contrary to celibacy, totally separated from it, and unable to contribute anything to it. And they understand celibacy as merely a pessimistic, negative rejection of married life and love. They even think celibacy is responsible for many sexual problems. About these matters people raise critical questions such as: Is marriage contrary to celibacy or even a rival? Is marriage a higher and better state than celibacy, or is it the other way around? Does marriage confirm celibacy or devalue it? If marriage confirms celibacy, how does it do so? 411 Benny Phang OCarm, an Indonesian priest [studying at the Angelicum for a doctorate in moral theology](#), can be addressed at Centro Internazionale Sant'Alberto; Via Sforza Pallavicini, 10; 00193 Roma, Italy. Blog: [theouiosoter.blogspot.com](#) Pbang - Marriage and Celibacy On this topic I want to draw some reflections from the messages of [Pope John Paul II](#) (collected in [Theology of the Body](#)), [from the critical reflection on celibacy in the Catholic Church](#) written by Aloysius Pieris SJ, and [from the experience of St. Thérèse](#) of Lisieux of her vocation to religious life. Rival Vocations? In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus places the counsel of celibacy in the discussion of the importance of marriage, when he argues against divorce (Mt 19:3-12). Pope John Paul confirms this, saying, "[From Matthew's Gospel, Mt 19:10-12], it can be seen sufficiently clearly that Marriage and celibacy, [here it is not a question](#) are interrelated. To hurt [of diminishing the value of matrimony in favor of](#) either one by being unfaithful continence, nor of less- in it also hurts the other. ening the value of one in comparison with the other."¹ ["Christ's words on this point are quite clear. He proposes to his disciples the ideal of continence and the call to it, not by reason of the inferiority](#) of, or of [prejudice against, conjugal union in the body, but only for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.](#)"² One can, however, argue for St. Paul's position when he writes, "So then, he who marries his fiancée does 412- well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better" (1 Co 7:38). Does this Pauline text not mean that matrimony is good, but celibacy for the kingdom of heaven is better?³ We need to comprehend the reason for celibacy in the evangelical counsel. Jesus says, "There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can" ([Mt 19:12](#)). This is [the](#) only reason for [the](#) evangelical counsel [of](#) celibacy. The reason is not to devalue marriage, but [for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. To understand the](#) "difference" between Jesus [and](#) Paul as regards celibacy and marriage, John Paul gives us an insight: In his pronouncement, did Christ perhaps suggest the superiority of continence for the kingdom of heaven to matrimony? Certainly he said that this is an exceptional vocation, not a common one. In addition he affirmed that it is especially important and necessary to the kingdom of heaven. If we understand superiority to matrimony in this sense, we must admit that Christ set it out implicitly. However, he did not express it directly. Only Paul will say of those who choose matrimony that they do "well." About those who are willing to live in voluntary continence, he will say that they do "better" (1 Co 7:38). (Theology, p. 275) The conscious and voluntary renunciation of the conjugal love of marriage and family life by celibate persons is not a devaluation of marriage, but it is a form of self-sacrifice. John Paul explains: "Christ understood the importance of such a sacrifice He understood the importance of this sacrifice also in relationship to the good which matrimony and the family in themselves constitute due to their divine institution" (Theology, p. 274). This sacrifice, however, contains within it a profound understanding [that marriage is temporary and that human beings' eternal destiny is the kingdom](#) of 413 [heaven](#), not the world. [Marriage and celibacy](#), then, [are interrelated. To hurt either one by being unfaithful in it also hurts the other](#). Think of priests or religious often hearing of divorces in their own families or among the families they serve. They might begin to ask themselves, "Why bother to be faithful to my celibacy? Nobody's faithful." The case is the same when married persons see priests or religious living careless and unfaithful lives. They might ask themselves, "Why bother to remain devoted and faithful to my marriage? Even my leaders in faith live unfaithfully to their holy vocations." The picture is clear. Marriage and celibacy are not rival vocations. They are strongly interrelated. They complement each other. Two Complementary Vocations In addressing spouses living their family lives and priests and religious living their [celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven](#), John Paul echoes Lumen gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (LG §11), by stressing that the family is the domestic church. This understanding also appears in some of his apostolic exhortations. He says to families, "The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be called the domestic church" (Familiaris consortio, FC §21). To priests he writes, "The Christian family, which is truly a 'domestic church,' has always offered and continues to offer favorable conditions for the birth of vocations" (Pastores dabo vobis, PDV §41). He calls [men and women religious](#) "the new family" [that is ready to do the will of God](#) (Vita consecrata, VC §41). 414 John Paul, thus, affirms [marriage and family life](#) in speaking of [the](#) celibate [life of](#) priests and religious, and vice versa. Marriage and celibacy are closely connected, although they are different vocations from God. We can compare this to Jesus' words about a tree and its fruits (Mt 7:17-18). A good family tree can bear the good fruit celibacy along with the good marriages of children and grandchildren. What then do these two vocations contribute to each other? Contributions of Marriage to Celibacy Fidelity. [Marriage is a covenant](#), "the covenant of conjugal love freely and consciously chosen, whereby man and woman accept the intimate community of life and love willed by God himself" (FC §11). As [a](#) covenant, marriage depends upon fidelity. When John Paul talks about marriage as the place of self-giving of men and women, he emphasizes fidelity: [The institution of marriage is not an undue interference by society or authority, nor the extrinsic imposition of a form. Rather it is an interior requirement of the covenant of conjugal love, which is publicly affirmed as unique and exclusive, in order to live in complete fidelity to the plan of God, the Creator. A person's freedom, far from being restricted by this fidelity, is secured against every form of subjectivism or relativism and is made a sharer in creative Wisdom.](#) (FC §11) Again, we can mention a tree and its fruits. A lifelong commitment to celibacy is learned from the example of fidelity in marriage and family life. If the family really functions as the domestic church and "a first seminary" (Optatam totius, OT §2), will-be-celibate persons learn there as children the value of fidelity. About his childhood John Paul said: "[Sometimes I would wake up during the night and find my father on his knees, just as I would always see him kneeling in the](#) 415 [parish church. We never spoke about a vocation to the priesthood, but his example was in a way my first seminary, a kind of domestic seminary.](#)"⁴ Similarly, Bernard Haring, the renowned moral theologian, in his reflection on priesthood, writes, "I believe that a happy marriage is a worthy image for a genuine and charismatically lived celibacy."⁵ To this John Paul adds, "Perfect conjugal love must be marked by that fidelity., on which religious profession and priestly celibacy are founded" (Theology, p. 277). Again, there is mutual support between the two vocations well lived. Total Gift of Oneself. Marriage depends also on the total gift of oneself. [Man and woman give themselves to each other](#) totally. [This includes](#) their bodies. In Ephesians St. Paul says: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own body. He who loves his wife loves himself" (Ep 5:21-28). And elsewhere he says: "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but her husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over

his own body, but the wife does" (1 Co 7:3-4). John Paul confirms [this](#) total self-giving: The first communion is the one which is established and which develops between husband and wife: by virtue of the covenant of married life, the man and woman "are no longer two but one flesh," and they are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving..., revealing in this way to the church and to the world the new communion of love, given by the grace of Christ. (FC § 19) This mutual giving is a great example and inspiration for celibate persons in their total self-giving to Christ and his church. St. John Chrysostom even [says, "If your marriage is like this, your perfection will rival the holiest of monks."](#)⁶ This self-giving of husband and wife out of reverence to Christ opens the door to an authentic celibate vocation for their children if God later grants them this gift. The [holy self-giving of their parents makes it easier for young people to give](#) themselves [totally to Christ and his church](#), even at the sacrifice of conjugal love. Paternity and Maternity. In marriage and childbearing, husband and wife become father and mother. The child confirms the husband's paternity and the wife's maternity. This fatherhood and motherhood influences and shapes the life of the child. William Pollack, a clinical psychologist and a [professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School](#), [The holy self-giving](#) tells of the of [their parents makes it easier](#) importance of maternity and for young [people to give themselves](#) paternity in, [totally to Christ and his church](#). for example, their son's life: "[Mothers help - - make boys into men Far from making boys weaker, the love of a mother can and does actually make boys stronger, emotionally and psychologically....](#) Fathers are not male mothers [Fathers--through the warm, playful](#), emphatic [relationships they forge with their sons--imbue boys with an important sense of safety and well-being that bolsters a boy's feelings of](#) masculine⁴¹⁷ [self-confidence](#)."⁷ John Paul sees the importance of paternity and maternity also in the lives of celibate men and women. Celibate persons cannot forget and reject "the conjugal meaning of the body, which from the beginning has been inscribed in the personal makeup of man and woman" (Theology, p. 278). Created as sexual [human beings](#), as [men and women](#) they carry in themselves paternity and maternity. As celibate persons they are called to live their sexuality well by developing spiritual paternity and maternity. This does not refute their celibacy; instead it simultaneously confirms it. John Paul asserts, "In spite of having renounced physical fecundity, the celibate person becomes spiritually fruitful, the father and mother of many, cooperating in the realization of the family according to God's plan" (FC §16). He also says, "Conjugal love which finds its expression in continence for the kingdom of heaven must lead in its normal development to paternity and maternity in a spiritual sense . . . in a way analogous to conjugal love which matures in physical paternity and maternity" (Theology, p. 278). Regarding this, St. Thérèse of Lisieux has shared her experience. When she was still living with her father, Thérèse called him "my dear King" because of his tenderness to her. It had a big impact in her life. Later, in her celibate Carmelite life, she experienced the Lord's goodness even in her suffering of her father's illness. She said, "[Yes, Papa's three years of martyrdom appear to me as the most lovable, the most fruitful of my life; I wouldn't exchange them for all the ecstasies and revelations of the saints.](#)"⁸ Healthy parents generate healthy children. Healthy marriages thus greatly inspire healthy celibate persons. Celibate persons are helped in developing their spiritual paternity and maternity if they experienced it in their family. Nemo dat quod non habet, nobody gives what they do not have. Celibate persons may have difficulty developing their spiritual paternity and maternity if they were greatly troubled by their parents' lack of it. Contributions of Celibacy to Marriage The [Importance of the Kingdom of Heaven. The destiny of human beings is the kingdom of heaven, not this world, which is passing away. People, therefore, must not become too attached to the goods of this world. Marriage is linked to this passing world. When Jesus debates with the Sadducees, who do not believe in the resurrection of the body, he asserts, "You are wrong... for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" \(Mt 22:29\). In accord with this, John Paul writes, "Marriage is tied in with the form of this world which is passing away and therefore in a certain sense imposes the necessity of being locked in this transiency" \(Theology, p. 296\). As we know, celibacy is \[for the sake of the kingdom of heaven\]\(#\); it is not locked \[in the transiency of the world\]\(#\). The pope explains further this excellence of the celibate life: "This perfect continence for love of the kingdom of heaven has always been held in high esteem by the church as a sign and stimulus of love, and as a singular source of spiritual fertility in the world" \(LG § 42\). \[In virginity and celibacy, chastity retains its original meaning, that is, of human sexuality lived as a genuine sign of and precious service to the love of communion and of interpersonal giving. This meaning is fully found in virginity which makes evident, even in the renunciation of marriage, the 'nuptial meaning' of the body through a communion and a personal gift to Jesus Christ and his church which prefigures and\]\(#\) 419 \[anticipates the perfect and final communion and self-giving of the world to come\]\(#\). "In virginity or celibacy, the human being is awaiting, also in a bodily way, the eschatological marriage of Christ with the church, giving himself or herself completely to the church in the hope that Christ may give himself to the church in the full truth of eternal life" \(FC §16\). \(PDV §29\) In his exhortation to men and women religious, John Paul argues that., by the example of a chaste life, celibate persons can excellently testify to the world, particularly to families: "The consecrated life must present to today's world examples of chastity lived by Celibacy is a reminder or a witness men and women who show that marriage is temporary, self-mastery, and that human beings' destiny an enterprising spirit, and psychology is the kingdom of heaven, and affective maturity. Thanks to this witness, human love is offered a stable point of reference: the pure love which consecrated persons draw from the contemplation of Trinitarian love, revealed to us in Christ" \(VC §88\). \[Celibacy is a reminder or a witness that marriage is temporary and that human beings' destiny is the kingdom of heaven\]\(#\). Insofar as all human life has an eschatological orientation, celibacy can be seen as "better" than marriage. It is an excellent witness for the world about the eternal life to come \(see Mt 22:30\). Those who live married life need this witness. Particularly now many challenges come to married life from \[a hedonistic culture, which separates sexuality from objective moral norms\]\(#\). This culture often treats sexuality \[as a mere diversion and a consumer good. With the complicity of\]\(#\) much in \[the media world, this culture indulges in a kind of idolatry of the sexual instinct. The consequences are psychic and moral suffering on the part of individuals and families\]\(#\). Addressing men and women religious, he proposes that celibacy offers a rejoinder to this challenge: The \[reply of the consecrated life is above all in the joyful living of perfect chastity, as a witness to the power of God's love manifested in the weakness of the human condition. The consecrated person attests that what many have believed impossible becomes, with the Lord's grace, possible and truly liberating This testimony is more necessary than ever today, precisely because it is so little understood by our world. It is offered to everyone--young people, engaged couples, husbands and wives and Christian families--in order to show that the power of God's love can accomplish great things precisely within the context of human love\]\(#\). \(VC §88\) This celibate way of life can \[contribute more to the realization of the kingdom of heaven in its earthly dimension\]\(#\) because it brings \[eschatological\]\(#\) completion into the picture. It helps people realize something of the kingdom of heaven while they are still on earth, and it prepares for its complete fulfillment in future life. Affirmation of Marriage. \[The only key to understanding the sacramentality of marriage is the spousal love of Christ for the church\]\(#\) \(see Ep 5:22-23\). Celibacy for \[the kingdom of heaven is a particular response to the love of the divine Spouse\]\(#\), Jesus Christ, "the Son of the Virgin, who was himself a virgin, that is, a 'eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven,' in the most perfect meaning of the term" \(Theology, p. 286\). Thus, celibacy 421 affirms the sacramentality of marriage. This particular response to the divine Spouse's love supposes intimacy between the celibate person and the divine Spouse. Michael H. Crosby describes this intimacy clearly: "When we speak of sexual intimacy, we refer to relationships which, given the natural course of things, are open to the possibility of genital expression. When we speak of celibate intimacy we are describing relationships which, by the mutual consent and commitment of the](#)

