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## MARRIAGE AND CELIBACY\_RIVALS OR COMPLEMENTS By Benny Phang

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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?
MMarirsiaugnedaenrdstacenldibinacgyaabreouotfttehnesseeentwaos cvoonctraatriioens.s still exists among many
people who do not fully under- stand celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven or the meaning of marriage.
They see marriage as con- trary 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. Therese 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 impor- tance 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 fiancee does 412- well; and he who refrains from
marriage will do better" (1 Co 7:38). Does this Pauline text not mean that mat-rimony 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 direcdy. Only Paul will say of those who choose matri- mony that they do "well." About
those who are willing to live in voluntary continence, he will say that they do "better" (! Co 7:38). (Theology, p. 275)
The conscious and voluntary renunciation of the conjugal love of marriage and family life by celibate per- sons 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 pro- found understanding that marriage is temporary and that human beings' eternal destiny is the
kingdom of413 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 them- selves, "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 gen- tium, 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 fam-
ily constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be
called the domestic church" (Familiar# consor- rio, 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
con- tribute 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 cov- enant, 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 interfer- ence by society or authority, nor the extrinsic imposi- tion 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 subjectiv- ism 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 Hiiring, 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."s 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 hus- bands as you are to the Lord .... In the same way, hus- bands
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 hus- band. For the wife
does not have authority over her own body, but her husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over
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his own body, but the wife does" (\underline{1} Co \underline{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
inspi- ration 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 them- selves totally to Christ and his
church, even at the sac- rifice of conjugal love. Paternity and Maternity. In marriage and childbear- ing, 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 clini- cal 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 foryoung 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
conju- gal 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 celi- bacy; instead it simultaneously confirms it. John Paul asserts, "In spite of
having renounced physical fecun- dity, the celibate person becomes spiritually fruitful, the father and mother of many,
cooperating in the realiza- tion 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. Th6r~se of Lisieux has shared her experience. When she was still
living with her father, Th~r~se called him "my dear King" because of his ten- derness 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 revela- tions of the saints."8 Healthy parents generate healthy
children. Healthy marriages thus greatly inspire healthy celibate persons. Celibate persons are helped in developing
their spiri- tual paternity and maternity if they experienced it in their family. Nemo dat quod non babet, 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 des- tiny 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 singu- lar 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 genu- ine sign
of and precious service to the love of com- munion 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 bal- that marriage is temporary
ance, self-mastery, and that human beings" destiny an enterprising spirit, and psy- is the kingdom of heaven,
chological 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 king- dom of
heaven. Insofar as all human life has an eschato- logical 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 whb 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 sexu- ality as a mere diversion and a consumer good.
With .the complicity of much in the media world, this cul- ture 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 liberat- ing .... This testimony is more necessary than ever today, precisely because it is so litde
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 understand- ing 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 inti- macy 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 com- mitment of the
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persons involved, are not open to future genital expression."9 Crosby says further that the inti- macy in celibate life is
a contemplative intimacy, a life that is fully absorbed in the love of God. This absorp- tion, for example, makes St.
There so f Lisieux in her suffering joyfully exclaim, "O Jesus, my Love, I have found my place in the bosom of the
church: in the heart of my Mother, I will be love." This response to the divine Spouse's love is a uni- tive love. "The
unitive love which consecrated celibacy symbolizes is what the great religious figures of our tra- dition have called
contemplation. As a charism, celibacy is the public face of contemplative experience making visible in this world the
absolute freedom, the captivat- ing beauty, the supreme generosity, and the ultimate fidelity of that divine love that
\underline{\text{moves the sun and the other stars.}} \text{"} 1 \sim \text{Bernard Hiiring sees this response as an act of trust in God alone: } \underline{\text{"To live}}
celibacy and to love celibately in today's world is a venture that can be rea- sonably undertaken only when we place
our trust, not in ourselves, but in God alone, and remain open to the guidance of Holy Mystery at all times."12 John
Paul sees this celibate response to God's love as a contribution to marriage and family life. He empha- 4221 sizes
faithfulness or fidelity: "Christian couples have the right to expect from celibate persons a good example and a witness
of fidelity to their vocation until death. Just as fidelity at times becomes difficult for married people and requires
sacrifice, mortification, and self- denial, the same can happen to celibate persons, and their fidelity, even in the trials
that may occur, should strengthen the fidelity of married couples" (FC §16). The celibate life, then, affirms marriage; it
does so, uniquely, by renouncing it. John Paul says: The realization of this call serves also in a particular way to
confirm the nuptial meaning of the human body in its masculinity and femininity. The renun- ciation of marriage for
the kingdom of heaven at the same time highlights that meaning in all its inte- rior truth and personal beauty. We can
say that this renunciation on the part of individual persons, men and women, in a certain sense is indispensable. This
is so that the nuptial meaning of the body can be more easily recognized in the whole ethos of human life and above
all in the ethos of conjugal and family life. (Theology, pp. 285-286) Pieris's Critical Words on Celibacy After hearing a
"nice" reflection on celibacy, we need also to hear some critical remarks. Critical but also beneficial is the reflection on
celibacy made by Aloysius Pieris, a Sri Lankan Jesuit who has written extensively on the way to be the Asian church.
On our topic he makes use of the forgotten theological praxis of the early church. synthesis of both/and instead of
either/or.~3 Discussing Pieris reminds Pope Benedict of the great catholic future church ministries, Pieris stresses the
equality of those who choose marriage or celibacy: "The difference between them is not based on any 'intrinsic value'
that makes one superior to the other (on the basis that Jesus 423 chose one of them rather than the other)."14 He
says that the idea of superior or inferior in state-of-life vocations comes from the idea that holiness is hierarchically
strati- fied and not charismatically diverse within one universal call to holiness, as Vatican Council II has stated.
According to Pieris, the question "'Then what did my religious vows bestow upon me which I had not already been
given at my baptism?' [is] the question that disclosed the identity crisis of those men and women who thought that
marriage was the Creator's concession to ordinary peo- ple enfeebled by their flesh whereas as celibates they them-
selves were elevated to the higher life of the Spirit."~s Although he himself is a celibate religious, Pieris is critical of a
celibacy based only on a superficial spiritu- ality and a hunger for higher social status and financial security: Celibacy
even in religious life can be a deception if it is a guarantee of financial security. Collective ownership of property may
reflect a situation wherein the per- sonal practice of poverty is made comfortable through the security provided by a
collectively enjoyed wealth. The marriage between the cult of money and the cult of celibacy must be dissolved for
good. Otherwise, we shall continue to produce comfortable bachelors and spinsters in place of committed celibates.
Pieris reminds celibate persons that for the apostles the main scandal was money, not sex, and Judas was the main
protagonist of it. He hopes that this scandal will not be repeated in the church of the future. He acknowledges,
however, that the noble divine vocations to poverty and celibacy are complementary. He con-cludes by saying: "An
evangelical reappraisal of marriage and celibacy is an urgent need. They must be treated as God-given rather than
church-conferred vocations within the ministry, that is, within both sedentary min- istry and itinerant ministry. Two
there are, not one!" Love Comprises All Vocations As domestic church and first seminary, married life contributes to
the celibate life the example of fidelity, total gift of oneself, and paternity and maternity. The celibate life, in turn,
contributes to the married life the example of earthly life oriented to the kingdom of heaven and the example of
genuine, pure, intimate love of God and of countless fellow human beings. Marriage and celibacy are complementary.
St. Augustine advises us, "Love and do what you will." Marriage and celibate life are two ways to respond to God's
vocation to love. Married couples and celi- bates are called to love genuinely in their own ways. St. Th6rbse of Lisieux
tells us that, whatever our vocation is, "love comprises all vocations, that love is everything, that it embraces all times
and places.., in a word, that it is eternal."~6 Notes ~ John Paul II, Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine
Plan (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), p. 273. Hereafter: Theology. [Texts quoted from this book are
sometimes slightly modified in the light of new translations in the book's revised edition of 2006, Man and Woman He
Created Them: A Theology of the Body. Ed.] 2 Theology, p. 276. 3 Here celibacy is understood as celibacy for the sake
of the king- dom of heaven (Mt 19:12). This term needs to be understood well since there are many reasons for
celibacy, such as impotency, transcending gender, cultic celibacy, coerced celibacy, and celibacy to conserve semen.
See Elizabeth Abbott, A History of Cdibacy (New York: Scribner, 2000), pp. 7-12. 4 Pope John Paul II, Gift and
Mystery: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of My Priestly Ordination (New York: Doubleday, 1999), p. 20. s Bernard H~ring,
Priesthood Imperiled: A Critical Examination of Ministry in the Catholic Church (Liguori, Mo.: Triumph Books, 1989), p.
98. 6 St. John Chrysostom, On Marriage and Family Life (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986),
p. 62. 425 7 William Pollack, Real Boys (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), pp. 81,113, 115-116. s See Story
of a Soul: Autobiography of St. Tbir~se of Lisieux, trans. John Clarke OCD (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1996),
p. 37 & 157. 9 Michael H. Crosby, Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart? (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press,
1996), p. 156. 10 Th~r~se, Story, p. 194. 1, Crosby, Celibacy, p. 188. 12 Hiiring, Priesthood Imperiled, p. 99. 13 See
the message of Benedict XvI to the priests in the dioceses of Bellune-Feltre and Treviso, 16 August 2007. 14 Aloysius
Pieris SJ, "Two There Are, Your Holiness: Suggestions for the Next Pope's Agenda in Line with John Paul II's Invitation
in Ut Unum Sint," at www.theokuleuven.be/clt. is Aloysius Pieris SJ, "Vatican II: A 'Crisigenic' Council with an
Unwritten Agenda," at www.sedos.org/english/pieris.htm. 16 See Th~r~se, Story, p. 194. Poets' Ad drdsses 352 By
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Road 'Adrian, Michigan 49221 pschnapp@sienaheights,edu Pbang — Marriage and Celibacy Pbang — Marriage a~d
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