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**THE VOCATION AND SEXUALITY OF SINGLE PEOPLE:
A Study in Light of the Thoughts of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Theology of
the Body of Pope St. John Paul II**

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ABSTRACT

The Second Vatican Council teachings in *Lumen gentium* that all men and women have a “call to holiness” as a means of sanctification. The call to holiness is a call to love; precisely, a call to love God and neighbour. The call to holiness through the vocation of love in the communion of persons and in the communion with God is one and the same for all men and women, but the path or manner of its actualization is different. For the realization of this call, there is a unique path for bishops, priests, consecrated persons, married couples and single persons in accordance with their proper vocation and state. The specificity and uniqueness of the path of holiness for single members of the laity are often not the point of focus in the teachings of the Church and that is specifically our concern in this research.

The specificity and uniqueness of this study is the vocation and sexuality of single person under the following points: (1) The implication of the notion of the spousal meaning of the body in the *Theology of the Body* (TOB) of John Paul II on the life of single persons. (2) The proper and chaste manner in which single persons can express love in fulfilment of their vocation of love. (3) The specific and authentic vocation and state of singles in the Church. These three points are intrinsically connected: Single persons can only fulfil their vocation of love and their call to holiness when they are able to express love chastely in the communion of persons through the spousal meaning of the body in a way that is in accordance with their specific and authentic vocation and state in the Church. These points inform the unique focus of this study, in addition to the need to chart a clear and distinct path to a life of fruitfulness, fulfilment and happiness for single persons.

In the TOB, the creation of man as male and female with a sexual nature for the purpose of love and communion is the foundation for John Paul II’s notion of the spousal meaning of the body. Precisely, man including all singles were creation with a body that possesses a spousal meaning so that they can fulfil their vocation of love through their expression of love in the communion of persons. The Pope presents an understanding of the human body as a gift and as a means of expressing and experiencing love in communion through a mutual gift of self. Though he did not specifically address single persons in his catechetical talks, we can confirm that the bodies of singles also possess a spousal meaning by virtue of their creation with a sexual nature and a power to express love in their masculinity and femininity.

The specific manner in which single person can express love through the spousal meaning of the body was not addressed as such in the TOB. Thus, in the situation in which some revisionist views have suggested various manner of expressing love by singles person that are contrary to the teachings of the Church, we recall the teachings of Thomas Aquinas to reaffirm that the act of sexual intercourse among single persons is morally and intrinsically sinful because they are not in accord with right reason and a well-ordered will. John Paul II also affirms that the sexual intercourse of single persons is not a sincere or total gift of self; rather, it is a lie. Thus, singles cannot legitimately expression love through sexual intercourse.

Having established that single persons cannot legitimately express love through sexual intercourse, the question remains as to how they can proper express love in the communion of persons. In order

to answer this question, the confirmation of the specific and authentic vocation and state of single person in the Church is inevitable. Through our research, we have sought to establish that the life of single persons can be an specific and authentic celibate vocation within the lay state, that is, they are lay celibates. As celibates, their vocation is distinct from the vocation of consecrated and priestly celibates. As lay persons, their state is distinct from the state of married persons. Through discernment and acceptance of their state as a means of God's calling and through a firm decision for a life of celibacy, the life of singles can be an authentic vocation and state in the Church through which they can validly and successfully fulfil their vocation of love and their call to holiness.

As a practical means of fulfilling their vocation of love in a chaste manner, we propose the teachings of Aquinas on friendship as uniquely applicable to single persons. Aquinas's friendship of virtue is the appropriate context in which singles can chastely express love through the spousal meaning of the body. In our combined study of Aquinas's concept of friendship and John Paul II's concept of the spousal meaning of the body and applying them to our study of vocation and sexuality of single persons, this research has sought to recontextualize and broaden the understanding of the life of single persons and John Paul II's teaching on the spousal meaning of the body. In this study, we have argued for and demonstrated a more positive and compelling conception of the single life, and we are confident that this conception and its spiritual values will greatly motivate singles in their moral and spiritual path towards fruitfulness, fulfilment, holiness and perfection.

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