

Blessed Pius IX says that, in the same way that the Old Testament Joseph was appointed over all the storehouses of Egypt, Joseph of the New Testament was appointed 'the guardian of His choicest treasures.' By analogy, God has entrusted some of his greatest treasures, children, to earthly fathers (*Quemadmodum Deus, 1870*) Pius IX acclaimed Joseph as the 'faithful and prudent servant who the Lord has set over His household' (*Inclytum Patriarcham, 1871*).

Since before the birth of Christ, Mary has been upheld as not only the prime example of Christian life but especially as the perfect manifestation of Christian womanhood. In *Redemptoris Custos*, Blessed John Paul II

writes that in Joseph human fatherhood was also "taken up" in the mystery of Christ's Incarnation,

"the mystery in which Joseph of Nazareth "shared" like no other human being except Mary, ... he was involved in the same salvific event; he was the guardian of the same love" (*Redemptoris Custos, 1*).

John Paul II goes on to point out that the angel of the Lord entrusts the incarnate Christ into the care of Joseph's earthly fatherhood, entrusting him with the task of naming the child Jesus. Joseph's earthly fatherhood serves as an exemplar of all human fatherhood. How did this fatherhood express itself? What can we draw from his example for our discussion of fatherhood?

"His fatherhood is expressed concretely "in his having made his life a service, a sacrifice ... a total gift of self, of his life and work" (*Redemptoris Custos, 8*).

John Paul II makes the important observation that we have no direct speech attributed to him in Scripture. Joseph is not known by what he says. Joseph 'speaks', says John Paul II, through his actions. Three times he is obedient to God's word given through an angel. His fatherly protection and nurture contribute to his overall fulfillment of the earthly fatherhood of Christ.

Basil of Caesarea writes that Joseph's chaste marriage to Mary hides her from the attention of worldly and demonic enemies and thus effectively protects her from them (*On the Holy Generation of Christ, 3*). Basil teaches that it is through Joseph's chaste marriage that Mary's virginity is protected from misunderstanding and false accusations (*On the Holy Generation of Christ, 3*). So Joseph's role as spouse to the Virgin Mary is fulfilled not merely in his physical or social protection of her but in that, within his nurturing protection, he enables, encourages and empowers Mary's own amazing vocation to flourish and bloom into the pinnacle of earthly womanhood. His manhood is complete in playing its humble yet fundamental part in the completion of her full expression of womanhood! Christian manhood aims first to bring others to the full vocation for which God created them.

The Heavenly Father who urges us to ask for everything from our 'daily bread' to 'deliverance from evil', is the one who gives Himself completely over to fulfilling these needs. In the same way, fatherhood, in all forms, is an expression of Divine Fatherhood. True fatherhood, and true masculinity, cannot be the 'patriarchal' dominant, arbitrarily abusive stereotype of fatherhood which the world so frequently misrepresents as the way things were done in the 'old days'. Fatherhood based on God's Fatherhood can only be a selfless and complete gift of everything a man has in service of those in his care.

Spiritual fatherhood must be fulfilled in Church and family life, informal and private relationships as well as formal family and Church rituals. "Liturgy, as with family ritual, is an extension of the father's teaching." We should not imagine that education is limited to multiplication tables or even the learning of the Catechism. A spiritual father first listens to those in his care. *Before having answers, he must be the one who listens.* In order to nurture and protect those in his care, a father of any variety must seek to understand the nature of the dangers that threaten and the areas where education, support and growth in virtue are necessary for the full flourishing of those

in his charge. Perhaps this 'listening' could be pressed further to a certain empathy with the problems presented by those in his care. A father would then image God's own empathy with the suffering and problems of his people. God knows the suffering of his people in Egypt (Ex 3:7), even as he hears their cry. A father seeking to image Divine Fatherhood, then, is pressed to a far greater empathy and intimacy with the pains and struggles of those in his care.

A spiritual father is to keep order in his own house then extend this order into his work and leadership within the community (1 Tim 3:4). St Paul gives us some insight into the practical application of this spiritual fatherhood in his instructions to young Timothy. The young spiritual father is exhorted not to shy away from speaking the truth clearly, but that this speaking be done with utmost respect for the recipients (1 Tim 5:1-2). Paul suggests he speak to older men with the respect due to his own father, to older women as his own mother, to younger people as his own brothers and sisters. In other words, fatherhood is exercised in such a way that treats people as having the right to equal or perhaps even greater respect than ourselves.

As we can see, emphasising the differences in gifts, roles and contributions of man and woman by no means makes one greater than the other in dignity or value. As John Paul II has written,

"The personal resources of femininity are certainly no less than the resources of masculinity: they are merely different. Hence a woman, as well as a man, must understand her "fulfilment" as a person, her dignity and vocation, on the basis of these resources, according to the richness of the femininity which she received on the day of creation and which she inherits as an expression of the "image and likeness of God" that is specifically hers" (*Mulieris Dignitatem, 10*).

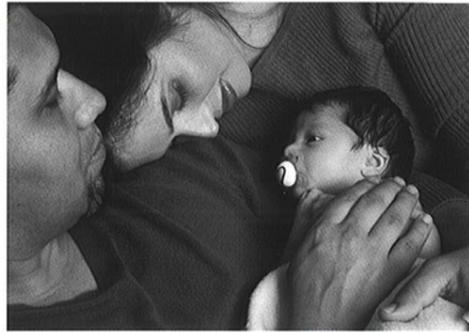
Likewise the man should seek to live out his vocation making full and proper use of the rich gift of manhood to express the image and likeness of God that is specifically and uniquely his. Manhood and masculinity are not only distinct from womanhood but have intrinsic dignity and immense value. Masculinity is inseparable from male humanity as femininity is inseparable from woman. Just as the feminine genius is worthy of nurture, praise and thanksgiving, there is an urgent need for a renewed focus on the masculine genius. The masculine contribution to the family, Church and society is critical to our flourishing as a human race, and as God's people.

<sup>1</sup>Called to be Fathers in the Church - Massimo Camisasca, F.S.C.B. Printed in Communio, Fall 2004, 496

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you think the "ideal man" is sometimes presented at opposite extremes: insensitive to others or, on the other hand, too sensitive and unable to exercise his strength for service? Who should the model(s) for Manhood be and why?
2. How do male and female together image the Triune God? In what ways do they complement each other? Can you think of some examples from your experience?
3. In what ways should a man's fatherhood image the fatherhood of God?
4. How did St Joseph image the fatherhood of God in everyday life? What are some practical ways in which men are called to live out their fatherhood?

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# MANHOOD & MASCULINITY

## In Scripture and Tradition

## INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the unique and positive contribution of women to relationships, the Church and society. In his encyclical *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), Blessed John Paul II devotes several paragraphs to the rights and roles of women and specific offences against women's rights and dignity. In contrast to the considerable attention he devotes to defining, celebrating and defending womanhood, he includes only one short paragraph that speaks of men as husbands and fathers. Even this one paragraph is mostly concerned with men's treatment of women and children! Blessed John Paul II is not alone in this. It seems there has been relatively little attention given to masculinity and manhood in the Church's teaching until very recently.

Seven years after *Familiaris Consortio*, the Pope produced an Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women. *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988), as the letter was called, begins with a reminder that this new focus on womanhood was heralded in the closing statements of the Second Vatican Council,

"The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved."

Another seven years later, in 1995, the same Pope's *Letter to Women* presented to the international women's conference held in Beijing insists that, "society certainly owes much to the 'genius of women'" (*Letter to Women*, 9). It teaches that all women, in their very femininity, bring a unique and wonderful gift to human society, relationships and to all human situations. Since he first coined the phrase 'the genius of women' or 'the feminine genius', many other thinkers and writers have developed his insights.

What of the men? If there is a *feminine genius* shouldn't there also be a corresponding *masculine genius*? There is a great confusion in our society regarding roles and responsibilities of men. What does the Church have to say to a young man searching for guidance in developing a genuinely Christian manhood?

## DEFINING THE PROBLEM - MANHOOD ABDICATED

In recent years a number of authors have put literary voice to a growing swell of concern regarding a confusion on what makes a genuine man. The mythopoeic men's movement was popularised in John Gray's 1992 *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* which in turn produced such writers as psychologist Steve Biddulph and his *Manhood* (Published in the USA as *The Secret Life of Men*) and more popular *Raising Boys* and evangelical Christian author John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*.

From different perspectives these authors are all concerned about the confusion in society over what it means to be a man. Biddulph in particular traces the beginning of this demise to the industrial revolution which took fathers from their work in local roles, working close to their families, to industrial centres far away from their families. Whether he lived away or returned home late to collapse exhausted into his bed, the absent father has joined the single parent family as a major contributor to a confusion regarding manhood in males as they grow up. The absent father, who is always 'at work' has failed to pass on his example of manhood from one generation to the next due to the children's inability to observe the father in action in day to day life. As a result, fictional 'heroes', in movies and books, have had more influence over recent generations' ideas of manhood than their own fathers.

The lament of many in the secular context has been echoed within the Christian Tradition more recently with authors focusing primarily on Christian Fatherhood or Christian Manhood. Christian men, it seems, are a confused and dwindling breed.

In an article titled *Where are God's Warriors and Wild Men* Doug

Giles bluntly describes the challenge the Church presently faces,

"The current lack of strong men within the Church, both as leaders and numerically, has crippled our cathedrals and has helped devastate western society ethically. The masculine spirit being absent from the pulpit, the pew and subsequently the public square has not only slowed down the forward progress of the Church, it has also weakened our culture's morality, increased its secularism, and has assisted [owing to our absence] the effete elite in re-defining fundamental issues of life, sex, marriage and law. So how do we regain the masculine spirit in our houses of worship?"

Any failure of fatherhood has disastrous consequences,

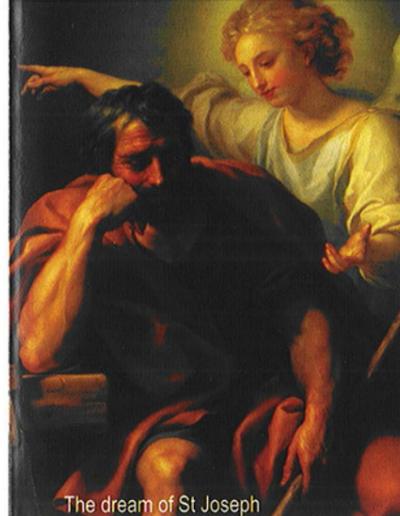
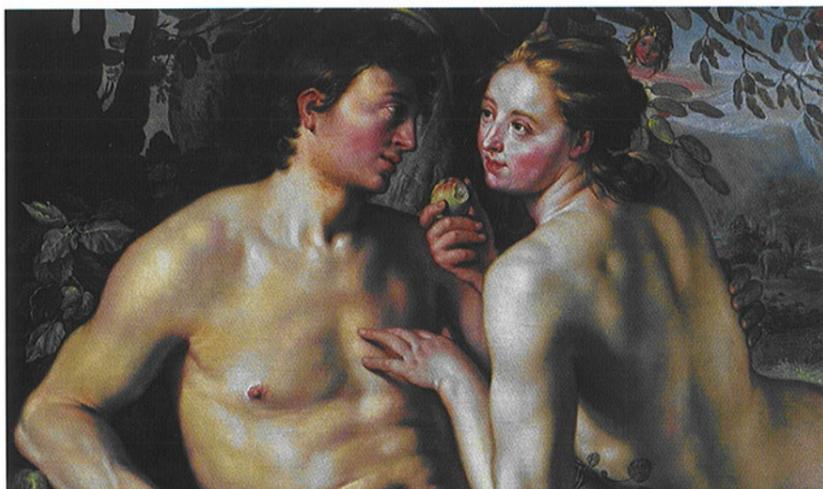
"As experience teaches, the absence of a father causes psychological and moral imbalance and notable difficulties in family relationships, as does, in contrary circumstances, the oppressive presence of a father, especially where there still prevails the phenomenon of "machismo," or a wrong superiority of male prerogatives which humiliates women and inhibits the development of healthy family relationships" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 25).

Before we even begin to answer Giles's question we must first answer the question "What is a genuinely *masculine* spirit?" Does such a thing exist, or is it a figment of some romantic tale?

## IN THE BEGINNING

At the heart of the ancient creation accounts recorded in Genesis we find the distinction between, and interdependence of, man and woman. Even in announcing his intention to make "a helper suitable for [the man]", God reveals something of the nature of this "helper". The word *helper* here means to "help, support", to "come to the aid of". It appears nineteen times in the Old Testament, with fifteen of those referring to divine aid. It is most often used of God's own help for an individual or a nation. This word carries a strong implication that the woman is an incarnation of God's divine 'help' for the man. The 'man' God seeks to help is still, at this stage in the text, the generic man from the Hebrew *adam* or the Greek *anthropos* representing humankind. The 'man' himself is changed by the taking of his rib and the presentation of his complementary opposite; in becoming a specifically male man (Hebrew *ish*), he corresponds to the specifically female woman (*ishah*). The helper through whom God brings his divine help to humankind could, in fact, refer to both the male and the female. Both sexes incarnate God's divine help in creating the communion which brings humankind to its full imaging of the divine communion in the Trinity. As Blessed John Paul II writes,

"The man not only accepts the gift [of woman]. At the same time he is received as a gift by the woman, in the revelation of the interior spiritual essence of his masculinity, together with the whole truth of his body and sex" (*Theology of the Body*, 72).



The dream of St Joseph

The Hebrew word used for "suitable for him" usually carries the meaning of "opposite", "counterpart" or "corresponding to". So the "helper" God makes for the man is one who is perfectly matched to the man. Not perfectly matched in sameness, but perfectly complementary to him, providing man with the divine help of God in and through the gift of woman to him. Naming woman as the complement of man is not to degrade her or suggest she is weaker, less important or lacking the dignity of the man. Only an equal in dignity and status before God could fulfill this role as perfect complement to the male.

In other words, men and women are equal, but different. To celebrate the dignity of man is also to celebrate the dignity of woman, since they are equal in dignity. Therefore men should rejoice that so much effort has been made of late to extol and describe the virtue, dignity and unique contribution of woman in Church and society, precisely because man is equal in dignity. With so many works praising and describing the dignity and genius of woman, men should be glad to be equal with such amazing persons. Why? Because, for every honour heaped upon woman for her genius and virtue, there must be an equal and complementary opposite genius and virtue to be extolled in man. All that remains is to discover and specifically describe and extol the virtues associated with manhood.

So what does the Church teach? Let us look at some of the key documents which help us to understand what the Church has taught regarding masculinity.

*Familiaris Consortio* teaches that God has inscribed the vocation, the capacity and responsibility of love on every human being. It insists that we cannot live without this love and that male expression of this conjugal love follows Christ's example as the heavenly bridegroom, in his sacrificial love for his bride, the Church. *Familiaris Consortio* also relates all human fatherhood to the fatherhood of God. That is, genuine fatherhood reflects and reveals the self sacrificing fatherly love of God the heavenly Father. Finally it calls fathers and husbands to lead by example in their moral and religious practice.

While primarily on the dignity of women, *Mulieris Dignitatem* teaches that man and woman are in the image of God to an equal degree, that one aspect of their 'imaging' God is their communion with each other. That is, that the masculine and the feminine find their definition and fulfilment in their relationship with the other. If this equal communion is distorted, the respective genders will "deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness" (10). *Mulieris Dignitatem* teaches that all women, including those not biologically mothers, participate in a kind of 'spiritual motherhood'. By analogy we could argue for a 'spiritual fatherhood' along the same lines. Finally it associates masculine spousal love with that of Christ's love for his Bride, the Church.

This spiritual motherhood is developed in Blessed John Paul II's *Letter to Women* which affirms that society owes much to the "genius of woman" which expresses itself in an "affective, cultural and spiritual motherhood" (9). Even acknowledging the uniqueness of women the Letter insists that "it is only through the duality of the "masculine" and the "feminine" that the "human" finds full realisation" (7). Woman and man are not involved in "undifferentiated equality" nor by "conflictual difference" but a "unity of the two" (8).

Regarding men in particular, Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) states as a 'most sacred law of nature' that fathers should provide for their children and that all laws, societies and working conditions uphold and protect this law (13). Society cannot 'rob' the father of his duty and right, nor can he abdicate it, and it is to the good of society that his home is well disciplined, to raise good citizens. The Encyclical is not against women 'working' outside the home but warns against forcing women and children into work unsuitable to their sex or age. Leo XIII specifically says that forcing a woman to work may disregard her dignity and disrupt the upbringing and education of their children. Blessed John Paul II develops this theme further in *Laborem Exercens* (1981) citing Genesis 3 to emphasise that 'man' must earn his daily bread by the sweat of his brow (1). But the Pope links this 'work'

with the 'subduing' of the Earth to which both man and woman are called and empowered. Work cannot be said to be peculiar to or even the predominant sphere of men from this document. The dignity of work is the dignity of the human doing the work, not the nature of the work itself but the work must uphold the dignity of the person doing it.

A number of teaching documents emphasise the example of St Joseph, in particular, Joseph's participation in Mary's sublime dignity. He is her life companion, witness of her maidenhood, and protector of her honour. In the Encyclical, *Quamquam Pluries* (1889), Pope Leo XIII expresses his hope that fathers learn from Joseph the virtues of 'paternal solicitude and vigilance'; husbands, his love, peace and conjugal fidelity; virgins see in him the model protector of chastity ('virginal integrity'); the rich, what riches to seek; the workers, the quiet dignity of labour (4).

Blessed John Paul II refers to Joseph, through his fatherhood, as truly a "minister of divine salvation" (*Apost. Exhort. Redemptoris Custos*, 1989, 8). Joseph speaks through deeds rather than words; his fatherly role as a teacher of the Law and of his trade reflects the dignity of the divine Father. We find in Joseph the harmony of the active and contemplative life.

Pope Paul VI praises Joseph on the basis that he sacrifices his own happiness, even his conjugal happiness to accept the responsibility and burden of the holy family. (*Homily on the Feast of St Joseph*, 27 March 1969) Joseph is poor, honest, hard working but with 'an unfathomable interior life'. He possessed logic and strength, self sacrificial love. He is proof that followers of Christ need only have "common, simple, human virtues."

Pope Benedict XV presents Joseph as the earthly agent of comfort, protection and advocacy (*motu proprio Bonum Sane*, July 25 1920, AAS, vol. XII [1920], p. 313 Source: le Voci 1961).

Pope Pius XI says Joseph is a chaste, pious and modest worker and a 'powerful shield of defense' (Blessed John XXIII cites "at least four occasions during speeches at the canonisations of new saints and on the Feast of March 19 (for example in 1928, later in 1935, and in 1937)," as the source of his summary of Pius XI Source: le Voci 1961).

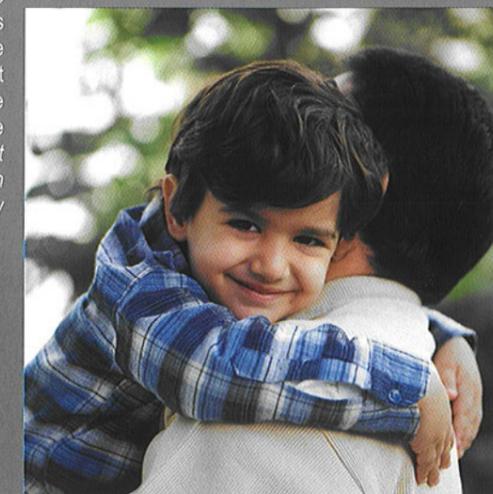
Pope Pius XII called workers to honour Joseph as a 'lofty model' and 'staunch guardian' and invokes his care against the lure to selfish use of wealth gained (Address to the members of the Association of Christian workers, AAS, vol. XXXVII [1945], p. 72 Source: le Voci 1961).

Blessed John XXIII describes Joseph as quiet, thoughtful, unobserved, unrecognised, humble and silent. The prayer invoking Joseph as patron of Vatican II calls on his inner spirit of peace, silence, good work, prayer and strong yet tender love of Jesus. (*Apostolic Epistle*, Source: le Voci 1961)

## MANHOOD AND FATHERHOOD

It is impossible to separate any description of manhood from fatherhood, both in the sense of a man's immediate family and of a wider 'spiritual fatherhood'. Not one male can abdicate this responsibility claiming they are not a father. All men are called to exercise their spiritual fatherhood appropriately according to their situation and vocation. Blessed John Paul II speaks of man "revealing and... reliving on earth the very fatherhood of God" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 25)

The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) describes the family as a 'school of deeper humanity' in which the father's active presence is 'highly beneficial to their formation'. It says the children need the care of their mother at home and that this role [of the mother] must be safely preserved *without underrating her value in all other areas of society* (52).



"Genuine fatherhood reflects and reveals the self sacrificing fatherly love of God the heavenly Father."