



Humanum

ISSUES IN FAMILY, CULTURE & SCIENCE

2019 - ISSUE THREE

Saying "I Do"





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Being Willing to Give Ourselves Away: The Vocations Issue

MARGARET HARPER MCCARTHY

What does it mean to be an adult? Some think of maturity in terms of self-possession. But what if adulthood is actually the condition in which we realize that we do not, in fact, “possess” ourselves? What if being truly adult means being ready and willing to say “I do,” to give ourselves away—wholly and irrevocably—to another? Adulthood has to be more than just a verb: “adulting” here and there, once in a while, when it suits us. To mature as a human being implies a certain “ripeness,” the ability to bear fruit. But we can only do that when we have given ourselves away. That is why we possess ourselves in the first place, to have something to give.

Is it really possible to bind ourselves for a lifetime? Isn't this antithetical to freedom? Are we really capable of making a commitment which involves suffering through thick and thin or in sickness and sorrow? **Benedict XVI** was acutely aware of these questions and the objections behind them: “Man’s refusal to make any commitment . . . is becoming increasingly widespread as a result of a false understanding of freedom and self-realization as well as the desire to escape suffering.” Yet, he noted that this refusal “means that man remains closed in on himself and keeps his ‘I’ ultimately for himself, without really rising above it The key figures of human existence likewise vanish: father, mother, child—essential elements of the experience of being human are lost.” The solution, according to Benedict, lies in the preparedness we are examining in this third issue: “Only in self-giving does man find himself, and only by opening himself to the other, to others, to children, to the family, only by letting himself be changed through suffering, does he discover the breadth of his humanity.”

This issue, whose central focus is on what it means to love God (just as the second issue focused on what it means to know God) therefore looks not just at the vocation to marriage, but at all the primary paths to the “discovery of the breadth of our

humanity.” We explore the irrevocable commitments that follow that “I do.” The various states of life that we find ourselves in, or that we aspire, as young adults, to enter into.

And so, just as the Church is hanging its head in shame about the failures of priests and bishops to live out a mature commitment to their own calling, Humanum is asking about the deepest nature of this state of life. What if the solution to the current crisis lies not in tinkering with structures of power and decision-making, but rather in understanding better what the nature of the gift of priestly consecration truly is? We feature four examples of priests whose authority on the self-gift of the priest, rooted in both celibacy and prayer, rests on their lives as spiritual fathers to so many: [Bishop Barron](#), [Bishop Massimo Camisasca](#) (founder of a priestly missionary fraternity), [Fr. Carter Griffin](#) (rector of the John Paul II Seminary in Washington DC) and the late [Raymond Gawronski S.J.](#) (spiritual director at several seminaries during the course of his life). Each of these men, in his own way, offers an answer to the question about the cause of the recent scandal and the way out of it.

A crisis has been building up in the complementary arena of marriage as well. Where one vocation finds itself in trouble, other vocations will follow suit, because the root problem is a crisis in the very understanding of vocation itself. Social structures in our time militate against the possibility of hearing the “call” (vocare) to self-gift. The separation of the home from public life, the [corresponding evacuation of the home](#) and the devaluation of the activities that take place in it as well as of masculinity itself, all tend to obscure the essential transformative nature of marriage and family life as a life-affirming process for the maturing individual. [Sophie Caldecott](#) handles this masterfully in her witness to the process whereby a young woman who loved writing, but did not feel drawn to maternity, discovered that both could co-exist in a way she would not have predicted when she fell in love with her husband. Then there is also the vexing problem of actually finding a mate. Apart from the periods following the two world wars, perhaps, this aspect of the cultural crisis is unprecedented. Why is this? We seem to have lost sight of the culture of courtship, which is designed to help young adults find each other in ways that are both wise and humane, with the protections that chastity makes possible. Yet nature, as we know, abhors a vacuum. [Modern Romance](#) by Aziz Ansari offers an illuminating view on what rushes in to replace the old structures. How is it that a culture no longer takes interest in one of the things that, until recently, was one of its principle interests all over the world? [Carly Henderson](#) takes up this question as she looks at the inevitable influence of the modern conception of freedom on the animating principle of a courtship culture: the

ontological desire to love and be loved forever. Whilst we have to face the damage done by the spiritual warfare of our time, the solution, as Henderson says, is not to stifle this desire; nor is it to put a false “Christian” balm on it. Rather we have to face it, in the knowledge that it is after all Christ who is the ultimate object of that desire. **Marcie Stokman’s** response to Emily Esfahani Smith’s *The Power of Meaning: Finding Fulfillment in a World Obsessed with Happiness* reminds us that we need to incarnate this disposition in our everyday lives, if we are genuinely seeking to become mature human beings.

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The Priest As Father

FATHER MASSIMO CAMISASCA

The following excerpt is a chapter entitled "Fatherhood" from Massimo Camisasca's *Father: Will There Still Be Priests in Church's Future?*, trans. Joseph Ted Papa (Priestly Fraternity of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo, Inc., 2012): 73-80. It is reprinted with permission.

The Christian people calls priests "father," a popular expression that I find extremely meaningful. It expresses something that is deeply rooted in our vocation: we are called by God to be mature people, adults who accompany other men and women, whatever their age, to help them grow.

Our society needs fathers. Less and less common is the figure of one who, with authority and a positive, constructive spirit, accompanies his son in facing the battle of life. The fruits of this absence of the father figure are unfortunately seen in the growing insecurity of young people, and in their continual postponement of the end of adolescence. Where there has been no real experience of a relationship with the father, a creative relationship with reality becomes difficult: one endures it, but does not know how to face it. The young person risks assuming extreme positions towards reality, which, depending on individual temperament, could be on the one hand defensiveness, avoidance, diffidence or closedness, or on the other hand aggressiveness or preconceptions.

Insecurity and instability are characteristic of the world of young people today, many of whom see reality as an enemy. They fear going out of themselves. Afraid of what might happen, they insulate themselves, forming little cliques as protection. Virtual relationships via technology are preferred, or, more ominously, they take refuge in self-forgetfulness through drugs or the frantic pursuit of sex.

Carnal and spiritual fatherhood

We must help young people to rediscover their fathers, and help adults to be authoritative, accepting fathers and mothers. This can be assisted by the example of priests and their spiritual fatherhood. I use this expression to make it clear that I want

to speak here not of carnal generation but of putative: a fatherhood that takes on a person's education and training, even without a biological relationship. This is the great example offered to us by St. Joseph. Just as the Father entrusted the child Jesus to him, so the lives of our children are entrusted to us by Another. Certainly, a carnal father also generates so as to educate. No one generates merely to bring someone into the world, which would be less than human. Priests are also called to fatherhood: precisely we who, in the Latin Church, bind ourselves before our ordination to the gift of virginity.

Mature, authoritative personalities do not mean perfect personalities, without limitations or blemishes. Put simply, such people are engaged in life, enthusiastic about the grace they have received, and secure, not out of intellectual pride or ideological adherence to some truths, but because they have seriously abandoned themselves to the One who has met them, to save them. The lives of most of the young people whom I led to the priesthood were characterized by the presence of priests who did not remove them from their daily, normal life, but accompanied them in it, showing them how studies, affections, difficulties, and plans for the future were all more true, more beautiful and greater in following Christ. It is precisely within an ordinary life that one understands how extraordinary Jesus is. This is what impresses a young person: to see in a priest, not a specialist in prayer or the liturgy, or a good organizer of games and trips, but a true man who has found in Christ the most authentic development of his intellect and his affections.

The basic characteristic of maturity is faithfulness. God is faithful (1 Cor 1:9), and faithfulness is the highest form of the imitation of God. What most strikes a young person is the faithfulness with which an adult helps him to grow.

Becoming fathers

To become fathers, we must first recognize ourselves to be sons, as belonging to someone. Without this experience, we will not ourselves become generative and creative. One cannot be a father, one who generates, if he has no one for a father himself.

For a priest, that father could be the bishop or other superior, a wise priest, a spiritual father or a friend.

In the first place I want to stress the importance of the priest's relationship with his bishop (an analogous discussion could also be had regarding the superior of a

religious institute). There is an institutional side to this relationship. We do not choose our bishop—we find him. Aside from any personal qualities he may have, the bishop, objectively, is the sign of Christ and the source of our priesthood. The bishop could also have a charismatic, subjective side, which does not contradict the institutional side, but enriches it. The bishop can be a father, not only because he is the objective source of the ministry we exercise, but also as a guide to our growth.

For some time I have been convinced that the exercise of the bishop's ministry must be thoroughly rethought in light of all this, with a corresponding revision of his priorities. Bishops should go back to living with the seminarians, or they should at least dedicate an important portion of their time to them. Or, like great bishops of the past, they could choose to live a common life with some of their priests. I am thinking here of St. Augustine and St. Charles Borromeo.

The split between the father figure and the authority figure has, and continues to, hurt the Church. To the extent possible, the two figures need to be recombined. The bishop, who in recent decades has often been chosen for his administrative gifts, must return to being a father. Not only by right, but living and conceiving of himself as a father who offers himself for his children, and especially for his priests and seminarians.

Whoever our father may be, through him we enter the school of God the Father. Indeed, all human fatherhood comes from Him (cf. Eph 3:15). Only by discovering the fatherhood of God can we experience the value of every earthly fatherhood, and become fathers ourselves.

Entering the school of the saints, the great men and women who have marked the Church's life, our existence opens to horizons and depths previously unknown to us. Such relationships in no way exclude the other kinds of fatherhood that can be found in the world, and that reach us through literature, figurative art and music. Tradition is a river of fatherhood, coming to us to make us men.

Only if we become sons can we become fathers. This sums up the greatest experience of my mature years. Through Fr. Giussani I lived the experience of sonship. In a certain sense, through him I rediscovered my own father and, even more importantly, he made me a son to my own sons. I have been able to experience how important, and indeed consoling it is, to be able to learn new things from one's own growing children. Now I learn from those whom I gave birth to. My collaborators of today, who were my seminarians of yesterday, are the people who most enrich my life from day to day.

To become fathers and disciples of one's own sons also means to learn how to forgive. The experience of forgiveness enables us to look at the past positively. Only if we forgive the weaknesses of our fathers, can we teach others to become adults. When we are cut off from what came before us, we cannot bring those entrusted to us to fullness.

The meaning of spiritual fatherhood

Fatherhood is the imitation of God. Jesus revealed the definitive word of history: God is Father, and the texture of Being is fatherhood. God gives himself to man, making him a father. Fatherhood thus means to take care of another, since God is the One who generates and does not abandon, who creates and educates.

Carnal fatherhood is a participation in the work of creation, spiritual fatherhood in the work of education. In a fundamental and profound sense, therefore, spiritual fatherhood means education. It is above all a great respect for the presence of God in the other. It is the art of bringing the other to the full stature of his maturity. Christ left this task primarily to the Church, and thus our fatherhood is related to the Church's motherhood. The Church is the womb that generates children at the baptismal font, feeding and sustaining them through the sacraments, catechesis and mutual belonging. In the Church a true daily life develops, which is the generative source of education. We are only servants of the body of Christ. This all reveals a crucial dimension of spiritual fatherhood: the one who exercises it brings his children, not to himself, but to the Church.

This in fact is the real danger of spiritual fatherhood: to attach the person to oneself, emotionally, psychologically or by a sort of spiritual blackmail. When this happens, the spiritual father ends up becoming a kind of buffer between the one entrusted to him and the Church's life.

Fathers to human beings

At some time or another, however, everyone wants or needs advice, an opinion, a consoling word, or help in understanding the implications for his life of what the Church proclaims and proposes to all.

At these times, what should the priest do? Above all he must look to the liturgy, to the word that is said to the people, to the Magisterium addressed to the faithful. He is an intermediary, a bridge. He is like an index finger that points to another.

The people entrusted to us must always be able to recognize that, ultimately, it is not we who speak: it is the Church that speaks. Those we guide must always perceive themselves to be called to participate in a life with others, a life in community.

The priest is the terminus of Christ's mercy, the living sign of his acceptance, of his patience, of his bending down to us like the Good Samaritan.

Before giving a response, the priest must be someone who listens, who accepts, who gives the person a sense of having found their home. He must be someone who proposes the Church's way, never wearying of misunderstandings, fully loving each person's freedom and his time. No assent to what he proposes that is not motivated by a conscious freedom will bear stable and enduring fruit.

To the degree necessary, he should know how to give specific responses that help people move forward in life. When he sees the need, the priest must also admonish and correct, always having in view the good of the person he is dealing with. He is like a wise friend who helps to discover the correction that God himself wants to give, and to recognize the signs of his miracles in the world.

A priest must never yield to compromises regarding doctrine, but at the same time he must be merciful in the face of errors committed. People need both clarity and forgiveness. No mother who has aborted a child would find any consolation in being told that what she did was right. But neither is it enough to say: "you made a mistake." We must add: "but God forgives you." And we must accompany her in experiencing the meaning and implications of these words.

Looking at Jesus

To become a father means to no longer think of one's time and possessions as one's own. We thus leave behind a comfortable notion of life and, imitating Christ, become capable of giving ourselves and what we have received.

The Gospel is full of encounters. Jesus knew how to move among the people. He knew how to listen to them. He knew how to go to the heart of their need, without ignoring needs that were more superficial. Through the latter, in fact, he would bring the deeper needs to light. Nor did Jesus abandon people, but instead became their companion. All this, however, would not be enough. It could still be merely the mark and result of a good psychological training. More is needed: we must share with others the richness of what has been given to us, and that is not ours. This is why the Lord desired us, bringing us into the light from the emptiness in which we lived. It is why

he has given us faith and, finally, why he called us: to be dispensers of his goods or, as he himself says, administrators (cf. 1 Pt 4:10). To be apostles, in love only with him.

Priestly fatherhood is manifest, as with Jesus, above all in the power to forgive sins. People live under the weight of their sins and remorse of their past. Only God's forgiveness can free them. For this reason confession and the confessional are a privileged path of fatherhood.

Fatherhood is also shown in the teaching task entrusted to the priest. To teach means to reveal to men and women the merciful plan regarding their lives. We should prepare ourselves to teach through prayer, silence and study. Prepared to speak, we should also know when it is better to remain silent. And above all remember that we are the bearers of a truth that is not ours, and of which we are only servants.

As a teacher, the priest is not someone who knows and has answers for everything. Rather, he is one who daily learns from his Master. Jesus said: the Spirit will teach you all things (Jn 14:26). The priest encounters new problems and new human frontiers in his ongoing dialogue with people, and learns from Jesus how to go with them across these borders.

Our fatherhood finds its summation in the gift of the Eucharist. The celebration of Mass and eucharistic adoration are not marginal expressions of this fatherhood, but its heart. Through the Eucharist, we become ever more sons, and thus ever more fathers.

Bishop Massimo Camisasca is the founder of the [Priestly Fraternity of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo](#) (FSCB), which was recognized by John Paul II in 1999. He was the superior of the order until Benedict XVI appointed him Bishop of Reggio Emilia-Guastalla in 2012.

Bridget Jones, Vocation, and the "Problem" of Singleness

CARLY HENDERSON

Few films within the rom-com genre top 2001's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and few reveal the elements at play within the "problem" of singleness so directly.

Based on the popular and acclaimed 1996 novel of the same title by Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary* follows a year in the life of "singleton" Bridget Jones, a 30-something Londoner navigating personal vices, romantic relationships, friendships, career, and self-image. It's loosely based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, with Bridget (played to perfection by Renée Zellweger) being the Elizabeth Bennet of the story, Mark Darcy as the obvious Mr. Darcy (Colin Firth, who, ironically, played Fitzwilliam Darcy in the incomparable 1996 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*), and Daniel Cleaver (Hugh Grant, in rare villain form) standing in as the George Wickham character. Like Lizzie Bennet, Bridget has an initial, awkward run-in with the aloof Mark Darcy, instigated by her socially unaware mother. Bridget later—and shamefully—falls for Daniel Cleaver, who claims that he and Mark Darcy were best friends until Mark stole his fiancée. The rest of the movie follows the slow unraveling of that lie, as Bridget realizes that Mark is, in fact, the man for her.

Unlike Lizzie Bennet, Bridget is not, shall we say, your typical Austen heroine. Virtue and self-possession are not her strong points. She is, as Mark Darcy initially and unkindly describes her at a New Year's turkey curry buffet, a "verbally incontinent spinster who smokes like a chimney, drinks like a fish, and dresses like her mother." This description is not entirely inaccurate; in the following scene, Bridget deals with his rejection alone and drunk in her apartment, watching *Frasier* and pathetically lip-syncing to "All By Myself." Her attempts to take control of her life focus on losing weight, reducing her cigarette and alcohol consumption, and avoiding relationships with dysfunctional men—all of which she never quite accomplishes. We would, of course, never see Lizzie Bennet like this, even in a modern context.

Also, unlike Lizzie Bennet, Bridget is unhappily single. Lizzie declares that nothing but

the deepest love could persuade her into matrimony, and somehow, the reader knows she would be content even if she fails to find that love. We do not get this same sense from Bridget. Bridget hates her singleness, one reason being that everyone around her irritates her by asking why she's still single, as if it's her fault. In several relatable scenes to anyone who has been single into their 30s and beyond, it's clear that there is a certain pressure put on her by society to be married. Another reason is that the rest of her life is a bit of a disaster—her parents have separated and her job is a dead-end, among other things. And it is also true that she is unhappily single because she wants a relationship and does not have one. While at first it seems like she will take any man walking—as evidenced by her relationship with Daniel Cleaver when her self-respect goes utterly out the window—she, in the end, is not completely desperate. She wants something extraordinary, something worth giving her life to, although she does not fully realize this until she is loved, simply as she is, by Mark Darcy.

When Bridget Jones came out in the early 2000s, feminists were a bit torn on how to assess her. Some thought it problematic that she is so focused on her weight and is a bit hopeless in achieving her goals.[1] But most found it even more problematic that she is unhappily single and seemingly needs a man to be happy.[2] Some saw it as a weakness: her happiness lies in herself, and her task should only be to discover that! We see here a presupposed dichotomy: either Bridget needs only herself and the will to forge her own destiny to be happy, or Bridget needs a man to be happy. If these are the two options, then of course it should be the 'either', not the 'or.'

Incidentally, we see this dichotomy reflected in recent comments made by Bridget's creator herself. At the Hay Festival in 2017, Helen Fielding said that, if Bridget's story had been set today, it would have been quite different, precisely because there is significantly less societal pressure to be married. As such, there is more social acceptance of singletons as well as less traditional social roles. "The age of the singleton is over," the article from [The Telegraph](#) begins, and, it concludes, Bridget "would be fine" today—that is, she would have been happily single. In other words, her singleness would not have been a "problem" solvable only through a committed, monogamous relationship. In this way, Fielding seems to affirm the dichotomy and rule in favor of the principle that one needs only independence and self-possession to be happy. This admission from the story's creator is surprising, to say the least, not simply because it seems to forget its own Austenian roots and misrepresents the "problem" of the story, but even more so, because it does not coincide with Bridget's character at all. It is to say that the desire to marry is merely sociological, existing from the pressure a couple-centric culture puts on women (but, n.b., not men,

according to this framework), rather than something ontological. And, if it is sociological, and necessarily imposed on the person, then the only way to be free of it is through asserting one's own creative power in return. But to affirm this, as Fielding does, reduces Bridget's desire for a meaningful relationship simply to societal expectation, and this weakens Bridget's character. It is to say that Bridget's unhappiness is the result of her own misuse of choice and intention, her inability to be independent from the winds of society. This narrative is a reduction of Bridget herself and misses the actual point of her story.

The truth, however, is that this dichotomy—either Bridget needs only her independence, or Bridget needs a man—is a false one. In fact, it's neither. Bridget wants a relationship and does not want to be single, not simply because society tells her to feel that way, but because the desire is ontological, arising from her very nature. Even so, Bridget's journey lies not in simply finding any man who will do—if it was, she would have stayed with “office scoundrel” Daniel Cleaver. Instead, Bridget's journey is the unraveling of her life, and Mark Darcy gazing at her within it and simply loving her as she is. He assures her, “I like you very much, just as you are”—not the better version of Bridget, but Bridget in all her imperfections. After this declaration, we begin to see a transformation within Bridget. She does not immediately fall into his arms. Instead, his gaze brings order to her life, allowing her to know herself better and, because of this, gives her the confidence to walk away from Daniel Cleaver. Only after this does she begin to recognize her love for Darcy and, in relationship with him, realize her heart's desire. The point is that, in being seen and loved by the other, we come to know ourselves and are able to thus meaningfully give ourselves in love. The gaze from another—something we can never give ourselves—allows us to realize our nature.

Even so, the reductive cultural logic we see at work in Fielding's remarks is a response to the suffering that singleness can bring to the person. Indeed, the reduction of the single person's desire for marriage to something socially imposed on the person is pervasive in gender theory today.^[3] From this point of view, society has long been centered around the heterosexual couple and the family. In fact, culture is so centered on this principle that anyone who does not enter into marriage and family life is doomed to exist on the margins of society, devalued, misunderstood, and without ample opportunity to live freely and creatively. In this way, singleness becomes a “problem” to overcome. This causes a profound suffering in single people, and as such, cannot be good for society at large. The solution to this “problem,” they propose, is not to marry, but to remove the principle of the couple and the family as the cornerstone

of society precisely so that societal expectation does not impinge upon the freedom and opportunity of every person. This move promises to let every individual person simply be as one is by creating oneself unencumbered by societal expectations. This reveals a vision of the human person as free, autonomous, and fundamentally alone, as one who can enter into relationships (or not) and live one's life as one chooses. In this way, the "problem" of singleness is revealed to be non-existent after all. While the validity of this anthropology is debatable, what is important to see is that it is an attempt to mitigate and solve the suffering of the single person, and in that way, it is very sympathetic. Why have a culture centered on marriage and family if that means that those who, for whatever reason, cannot or choose not to marry are excluded and seemingly denied what should be theirs—namely, happiness and fulfillment? In this way, it is a movement to solve that injustice.

This cultural logic leaves its mark within Christian circles and does so primarily in two ways. On one hand, the feminist claim that a woman's happiness should not rest in a man alienates women who want nothing more in life than to be married and have children. In an article in [For the Church](#), Andrea Burke writes that, in her work with young women, she finds that they are embarrassed of their desire to marry, have children, and take care of a home. "They don't want to say it," she writes, "for fear that admitting it will make them look weak." The cultural narrative that tells women to pursue a meaningful career and to put oneself before others is so pervasive that, Burke writes, "when a 21-year-old girl sits across the table from me and tells me that she wants to be a mother, she blushes and gives a thousand caveats as to why she knows it's not the optimal choice." This embarrassment is a problem for Burke because it effectively silences and devalues the experience and desire of these young women for something that is beautiful, inherently and infinitely valuable, and ontological.

On the other hand, the culture's aim to solve the suffering of the single person is also evident in the practice of the Church, and this in two opposing ways. First, some speak to the suffering of the single person and offer hope in describing the single years as just an in-between time to endure as best one can until one inevitably finds one's vocation. While all certainly hope for this happy resolution, there is subtly hidden within this message an assurance, even a guarantee, that someday they will no longer be single.^[4] Second, some propose the vocation to the single life as a way of affirming the fruitfulness and dignity of being single. Both of these approaches, in their own way, seek to address and heal the suffering of uncertainty and loneliness that single persons often experience. Yet, in doing so, both in their own way do not solve or take

away the suffering. In fact, they can make it worse, precisely because both miss the point. Just as we saw earlier the false dichotomy at work in Bridget Jones, so too we see it here: either happiness lies in one's independence, or it lies solely in a romantic relationship with another. But again, both of these miss the point altogether.

The cultural and ecclesial attempts to mitigate and solve the suffering of the single person are, in some sense, commendable, but, in the end, ineffectual. This is because they ultimately ignore, bracket, or silence the suffering of the single person. These attempts force the single person to ignore the question at the heart of their suffering by essentially denying its existence. That question arises from the fact that every human person is made in and for love, and our deepest desire and vocation is to give ourselves away definitively in love. When that desire is unmet, for whatever reason, it causes a profound suffering that cannot be solved or taken away. It is an ache that can be expressed in the question: "What if my desire for a totalizing love will be forever unmet?"—which is another way of asking, "What if God does not have a plan for me?" It is the question that remains, aches, and keeps us up at night. Whether in subtly promising the single person the fulfillment of their hoped-for vocation to marriage, or in claiming that singleness is an end in and of itself, one overlooks and disregards this question. Even so, the question remains, under the surface perhaps, yet quietly oppressive.

The mystery lies in that, as one keeps this painful question alive in the heart, the possibility of a peaceful, hopeful life is possible. One has to face the question that one wants simultaneously to avoid, for it is in willingly facing it that we truly begin to see Christ's presence with us within the suffering, and this is the wellspring of hope. For it is through Christ's presence with us in that suffering that the possibility of a happiness, despite the absence of our heart's desire, can be glimpsed: within Christ's presence we begin to see that we are always and already from, for, and with Another. That we are never alone and without love. That we can be entirely ourselves, in our brokenness and fear, before God, and discover his gaze upon us, where we are loved just as we are. Asking the question of God is also to put all in God's hands in an act of hope, even if that act feels quite hopeless. It is to affirm and see Christ's presence with us, a presence that culminates in a loving gaze upon us. The truthful asking of the question is a beautiful witness for the Church, in fact, a heroic witness in our day. This gaze of Christ can be mediated to us in many forms within the community of the Church. It gives strength and order within the heart, because it grounds one in the truth of who one is in Christ. It is this realization and conviction that allows us in freedom to embrace a vocation, to embrace the cross of anticipation for one's

vocation, or the cross of that vocation's absence.

This experience of Christ's gaze makes the suffering of the single person mysteriously meaningful and fruitful for all, and even joyful. It doesn't necessarily take the suffering away, but it does place it within a meaningful framework. Yet, it cannot be arrived at without facing the ache at the heart of singleness. In fact, ignoring the question, as the cultural and ecclesial attempts we outlined above do, often only makes the pain existentially worse. To change the ontological framework and say, essentially, that singleness is not a suffering, is false balm that also is an affront to the experience and existential pain of many people. The key to "alleviate" the suffering is to start by seeing the suffering within singleness for what it is, not erase it.

This is what ultimately makes Bridget Jones so relatable. She suffers her singleness, like many of us do or have done, and sees it for what it is. One woman wrote in 2001 that, as a feminist, she was a bit embarrassed of her love for Bridget Jones, but it was not until she went to a book signing and there saw scores of all different types and ages of women that she became proud of her love of Bridget and was able to somehow reconcile it with her feminism. [5] And that is because Bridget's experience—an experience of singleness, but also an experience of being loved and discovering and accepting oneself—corresponds with the experience of other women from all walks of life. But Bridget knows that simply "getting rid" of the suffering of her singleness by either getting together with anyone who will take her, or denying its existence, isn't a true solution. Instead, she wrestles with it, accepts it, makes the best of it, and holds out hope for something extraordinary, precisely because she has the experience of being loved, imperfect as she is. This is what makes Bridget a character of depth and one that makes her so relatable and, in the end, admirable.

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[1] Jessica Reaves, "I'm a Feminist—and I Love 'Bridget Jones's Diary,'" *TIME*, April 13, 2001. See also Kelley A. Marsh, "Contextualizing Bridget Jones," *College Literature* 31, No. 1 (Winter, 2004): 52–72; esp. 53–56.

[2] See again Reaves, "I'm a Feminist." See also, for example, Fiona Sturges, "Bridget Jones is back and—let's face it—just a little bit thick," *The Telegraph*, March 24, 2016; and Suzanne Moore, "Why I hate Bridget Jones," *The Guardian*, September 30, 2013.

[3] See Shelley Budgeon, "The 'problem' with single women: Choice, accountability and social change," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 33, no. 3 (2016): 401–18.

[4] See, for example, Emily Stimpson, *The Catholic Girl's Survival Guide for the Single Years: The Nuts and Bolts of Staying Sane and Happy While Waiting for Mr. Right* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2012).

[5] Reaves, "I'm a Feminist."

The Spiritual Fatherhood of Father Raymond Gawronski

FR. JOHN NEPIL

I remember the first time I heard him laugh. It was the first seminary homily of a new spiritual director. It erupted so unexpectedly that even he appeared surprised by it. As it reverberated within the chapel walls, we sensed that something was about to awaken, something about to be made new.

That laugh struck me like thunder. It still, to this day, reverberates in my soul. It was symphonic, expressing something of humanity, levity, and joy. Perhaps I felt it so intensely because I was passing through that moment in seminary when orthodoxy first begins to harden. Something in that laugh told me that whatever was beneath those golden round glasses and grey beard was exactly what I needed.

Since that day in the fall of 2005, Father Raymond Gawronski became the spiritual father of our seminary. This was evidenced most clearly at his funeral in 2016, when over fifty of his spiritual sons, now priests all over the western United States, were drawn together to show their gratitude and offer their prayers. His fatherhood was remarkably pliable, extending to all kinds of personalities and theological dispositions. By transcending the self-imposed barriers within our seminary brotherhood, he quietly and paternally began to weave us together into unity.

Now Gawronski's sons have become fathers, and the older we get, the more we see just how singular he was. But the more we perceive the unique type of fatherhood he embodied, the harder it is to describe. The following is thus an attempt at the impossible: a description of something indescribable. At the very least, it will offer three signposts pointing to the mystery of divine paternity which we learned from Father Raymond Gawronski.

1. Fathers awaken humanity

Fathers do two things: they generate and they educate. The first brings life into being, the second brings that life to fullness. On the natural level, a man and a woman enter

into the work of co-creation with God through marital intimacy. But this generative moment is only the spark and beginning; the true life's work is a spiritual endeavor that we call education. At a certain point, the father takes the child from the comfort of the mother's arms and points him out into the world. This introduction to the fullness of reality is the act of education in the deepest sense—educare—meaning “to bring forth and lead out.” When a man sets out to spiritually father the child, he binds himself to a great promise: I will teach you what it means for you to be human in the midst of the world. This is the challenge of true fatherhood. It is also the crisis of our fatherless age.

The spiritual fatherhood of the priest is an educative one. As souls are reborn in God through the Marian maternity of the Church, so too are they guided and formed by the fatherhood of men configured to Christ the priest. This paternal work is a participation in a greater divine paternity, “whereby until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). The priest then is a father who taking spiritual children from the arms of Holy Mother Church, guides them into the world of vocation and mission in Christ. It is in this and this alone that the priest finds his deepest identity and greatest joy—precisely as father.

Often, what is lacking in the fatherhood of priests is a lived and concrete accompaniment of real spiritual children. The harvest is always plenty and the laborers few: who has time for real relationships? Nowadays, this has been intensified by the millions of rules, policies, and boundaries that regulate priestly relationships. Without touchstones of paternal communion, priestly existence becomes hermetically sealed off from actual relationships. We may be safe as we sit in our parish offices, but we are no longer acting as human fathers.

It was into this lacuna that Father Gawronski stepped, entering into the life of his sons with affability, humility and, most importantly, charity. Navigating the relational confines of our assessment-based seminaries is a challenging one; but Father Gawronski showed that it was at least possible. He continually proposed what many deemed too complicated—that spiritual fatherhood could be lived as friendship. In a manner befitting a father and son, it is truly possible that the goods, loves, and desires of one's life can be held in the bond of mutual benevolence. This was especially significant in seminary, where everything builds to the moment of ordination. There, a supernatural inversion occurs, when fathers first call their sons brothers. The natural ambit in which this transition unfolds is the maturation of friendship, which

though never losing its paternal character, is expanded so as to incorporate this newly formed fraternal bond.

Fathers awaken humanity, a daunting task, unlike any other. Péguy understood this, calling fathers “the adventurers of the modern world,” men who were “imprudent and daring fools.”^[1] When the human heart is awakened, when it is allowed to feel, it emerges precisely as it is: the uncontrollable, unattainable, but ultimately mysterious center of the human person. Father Gawronski was no false optimist in this regard, regularly recalling Jeremiah 17:9 to us: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?” It is always precarious to live from the heart, to actually allow the blood to flow into the wounds. As Rilke described it, this is “a life on the cliffs of the heart.” The call of man and the mission of the father are one—to step out of the cave of fear and venture boldly into the perils of human existence.

Though we might have been tempted to appropriate his mannerisms (and even some of his eccentricities), we always knew one thing: Father Gawronski wanted us to be ourselves. Despite the great force of his personality and his towering intellect, he was never interested in making replicas. It is the weak, insecure father who wants to recreate himself, projecting his own dreams and imposing his own aspirations on his sons. As brothers, we knew that what drew us together was not conformity to a prospective spiritual ideal, but the communion of diversity that can only originate in true fatherhood.

2. Fathers acknowledge limitedness

A pivotal moment in the formation of a priest happens when he realizes that he does not have what it takes. This runs contrary to the basic tenet of our millennial upbringing: “If you believe it, you can achieve it.” This deep instinct towards self-reliance and self-actualization requires a foundational disillusionment, one which has the capacity to break a man and shipwreck his vocation. To assume a vocation, purely through confidence in my talents, is a promethean act destined for ruin. What is needed then is an experienced guide, a season-tested captain who has endured many storms. As young seminarians, we needed a father who knew the Scylla and Charybdis of modern priestly life, who having been tied to the mast of Christ’s cross, had himself passed through their perils.

Positively considered, to say that a father helps me acknowledge my limitedness means he is helping me understand my creatureliness. Only when I experience this limitedness can a father help free me from the illusion that I am god. It is the humble

acknowledgement of bounds of my creaturely existence. This is the way through the snares of egotism and the enticements of perennial adolescence. The fatherless man lives with an existential ceiling; his inability to recognize creaturely limits leads to the ironic truncation of his own abilities. He is destined to the slavery of activism, to that blind and incessant drive to know oneself through one's work. But there is beauty in the acknowledgement of one's limitedness, as the Gestalt of my Christian existence begins to radiate and I come to see the true inner form of my life.

What first distinguished Father Gawronski from many of the priests of his generation was that he never despised our youth. He never mocked our excessive piety, nor humiliated us for our short-sighted self-reliance. By bearing with our youthful folly, he drew out from within us the deeper desires and a deeper vision of the Christian life. He knew what was in us, and patiently waited until our self-made projects collapsed—before lifting us up and dusting us off, helping us to learn how to laugh again.

3. Fathers teach us to behold

The spiritual endeavor of Gawronski's paternity is well summarized in the words of his own spiritual father, Hans Urs von Balthasar: "Perhaps only one thing remains vital today: namely [that] we can discover what other ages knew about encountering the overwhelming mystery of God."^[2]

In the end, this is really the only thing that matters. The awakened humanity and the acknowledgement of limitations are only existential forerunners to man's central purpose: the encounter of the mystery of God. What is unique in spiritual fathers like Gawronski is that they know the only way to discover the mystery of oneself is in the mystery of God. If human existence is not posed first as a question, then it will never be contemplated as a mystery. And if the mystery of the human question does not seek its answer in the mystery of the unknowable God, then it is destined to a life of fragmentation and incoherence, void of meaning and transcendence.

But all of this presupposes a vision, an ability to see. It was to this that Anaxagoras spoke five centuries before Christ, when positing the question of why we were on earth. His answer—to behold. It is this seeing, the Greek *theorein* and Latin *contemplatio*, that makes possible the human experiment of communion. It is upon this ability that the Christian faith stands or falls; and it was precisely this ability to "behold" that was lacking in us when we were young men preparing for priesthood. We knew how to do Christian things, but had never been taught how to perceive Christian realities.

In the love of a spiritual father, one begins to glimpse the rudimentary contours of the divine love of God the Father. But in revealing true fatherhood, it also reveals human fatherhood to be what it is—a mere pointer. Human fatherhood is thus contingent in nature and instrumental in character. This may be the tacit reason why so few priests attempt to live out spiritual fatherhood; because precisely in the moment that your children learn to perceive the fatherhood of God, you begin to pass away. This most painful of realizations—the inessential nature of my paternity—is a renunciation borne with specific intensity in the heart of every man endeavoring to be a father. But considered within the crucified ethos of Christian faith, this greatest of renunciations becomes the source of his greatest fruitfulness.

The final years of Father Gawronski's life were wrought with suffering. But it was in those years that he taught us the perennial Greek axiom *mathein-pathein*: to suffer is to learn, to learn is to suffer. If one awakens to humanity, acknowledges one's limitations and learns to see, one will truly be educated in humanity—albeit through suffering. Amidst this long, painful journey of self-awakening in Christ, the spiritual father stands as the steadfast and ever-present pillar who reminds us in the moment of suffering, “this is in fact what you want.” Only with that humble assurance of paternal friendship can any of us ever truly venture out on the life of faith, continually setting out on our adventure to the heart of God.

Now, three years since he died, there is a singular memory which will always synopsise the spiritual fatherhood of Raymond Gawronski. It was the final night of the pilgrimage to beauty, a three-week trip through the heights of Switzerland. Just before he was to give his final speech and conclude the trip, Father Gawronski completely lost his voice. Gesturing for pen and paper, he wrote his final words, and handing them to one of his spiritual sons, had them read out on his behalf. This act, seemingly insignificant, was in fact the moment when the mystery of Gawronski's fatherhood was revealed: we, his sons, were now to speak his words in our own voice. In the case of our father, a man fully captivated by the person of Jesus Christ, that word-legacy, to be spoken on his behalf, was simply the Word itself. Now we knew what Father Gawronski had endeavored all along: he was a father giving his sons to the Son; who in the Son, was giving them to the Father.

[1] Charles Péguy, *Clio I*, in *Temporal and Eternal* (London: The Harvill Press, 1932), 108: “There is only one adventurer in the world, as can be seen very clearly in the modern world, the father of a family. Even the most desperate adventurers are nothing compared with him. Everything in the modern world, even and perhaps most

of all contempt, is organized against that fool, that imprudent, daring fool.”

[2] H. U. von Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 33.

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The Unexpected Creativity of Motherhood

SOPHIE CALDECOTT

One of my earliest memories is of sitting underneath my mother's desk, filling notebook after notebook with scribbles that were imitations of her words, fulfilling a primal desire in my heart to make meaningful marks on that page before I even knew my alphabet.

I have known the desire to write for as long as I can remember; it has always been one of the strongest impulses in me, one which calms me when I feel anxious or agitated or sad, which helps me gather and organise my thoughts and feel at peace with myself and the world around me. When I was younger, I never really thought of this impulse as a gift or calling from God—it didn't occur to me to question the deeper meaning of something that feels as natural and necessary as breathing.

As I grew up, however, I was astonished to discover that not everyone loved to write, and I started to understand this impulse as part of a higher calling, an important piece of the unique identity God crafted for me. Now, whenever I hear people talking about using your gifts to glorify God, I know that I'm being asked to use words to bring myself and others into closer relationship with Him, if I possibly can.

The strange thing is, as clear as this calling to write has always been for me, I've never had that sense of clarity about my vocation to motherhood. While I enjoyed playing "grown ups" when I was a child, I was just as likely to be a nun as a mother in my make-believe games. I dreaded being asked to hold babies, felt awkward whenever I had to babysit (what do you talk to younger kids about? what should you do if they start crying?), and only really enjoyed playing with children when all I was required to do was tell stories and make up complicated imaginary worlds for them.

I'll never forget standing in the vast "Vocations exhibition" tent in Sydney at World Youth Day in 2008, feeling utterly lost and a little scared about the prospect of figuring out what to do with my life. Was my lack of maternal instinct a sign that I had a religious vocation? A nun enthusiastically waving a fistful of flyers at me thought it

might be.

The truth is, when I thought about any vocation back then in my early twenties, I encountered a huge blank emptiness within myself. I thought I should feel something, some kind of emotional response that would act as a clue, as I considered marriage and motherhood, or the religious life, but I felt nothing. In the abstract, any vocation is just theoretical; it's when we encounter God's calling in the form of a specific person that we know we're being called to marriage, and that's what happened to me when I met my husband. Ah, there you are, I thought to myself; meeting him felt like coming home to a place I hadn't realised I had been searching for. That should have been my first clue that God would lead me quietly, gently towards the things I never knew I needed.

Likewise, motherhood, rather than being something I chose or actively sought out, was something I fell into when I fell in love with—and married—my husband. It has been a trial of fire for me, as I've edged forwards blindly, just trying to follow the sound of God's voice as He calls me to make the next little step along a path I can't see.

One of the hardest questions I've grappled with over the last six years of early motherhood has been, what does it mean to respond to the call to write, alongside my vocation to motherhood? Are the two callings compatible?

At times, I've seen my maternal and my creative selves as being in conflict with each other, and felt fragmented by the tension. But slowly, over the years, I've been learning that they're complementary parts of the story God is writing for me. He put the desire and instinct to write in my heart for a reason: He wouldn't have put it there just to frustrate me. He also called me to motherhood: because He knows my heart more intimately than I know it myself, and He knows that this is the path that will lead me to Him.

For all that it's filled with many moments of joy and beauty, it's hard to get around the fact that motherhood involves a daily death to self. At times it feels like a purgatorial fire, stripping away the trappings of your old life and ways again and again, until you know you must either change, or be destroyed by it. With the birth of a baby, everything about a new parent's life is broken and remade, starting with the mother's body, and continuing with sleep patterns, daily routines, all the way through to cherished personal habits.

People talk about motherhood as if it's something so deep and instinctive that it always comes totally naturally and spontaneously. You don't need to think about the sacrifices involved, you just go along with it. It was a shock, then, in the early days, to be jerked awake by the crying of my first child, having temporarily forgotten that I had a baby, all maternal instincts apparently having vanished into the darkness. It wasn't that I didn't expect to be sleep deprived as a new parent. What surprised me was how the type of sleep deprivation that parents experience differs from any sleep deprivation I had ever experienced before. It isn't like staying up late to work or socialise, or even insomnia. This type of sleep deprivation is more akin to the form that is sometimes used as torture: unrelenting in its inevitability.

The study of sleep reveals it to be a powerful and mysterious thing: on the one hand, the US Justice Department claimed that prisoners in Guantanamo Bay who were subjected to sleep deprivation torture remained relatively unaffected by the process: "Surprisingly, little seem[s] to go wrong with the subjects physically," a memo reported. On the other hand, when the scientist Allan Rechtschaffen conducted a series of experiments on rats in the 1980s he discovered that after 32 days of sleep deprivation, every single one of the rats died. The interesting thing is that, despite the obvious correlative connection with sleep deprivation, researchers couldn't agree on the exact cause of death—namely, why the sleep deprivation had killed them.

Sleep seems to have alchemical properties, lowering levels of stress-related hormones and promoting cellular regeneration and growth. Extreme sleep deprivation, it has been noted, mimics the symptoms of psychosis; when Randy Gardner, a 17-year-old American high school student, set the current world record for the longest scientifically observed period of time without sleep in 1964 at 11 days and 24 minutes, he reportedly experienced hallucinations and paranoia, despite being able to win a game of pinball and speak without slurring or confusing his words even after 10 days without sleep.

When we are forced to stay awake too long, the brain experiences a series of rapid blackouts called "microsleep" for such fleeting periods of time that the person experiencing them might not even notice. New and sleep deprived parents, then, are battling one of the body's deepest and most mysterious biological needs. No wonder it feels like a crash-course in selflessness; you are quite literally fighting the body's self-preservation instinct so that you're able to protect and provide for your helpless baby.

In those early weeks when my first daughter was a newborn, my husband and I took shifts with her when she cried. Miraculously, we never lost it at the same time, always

finding an impossible gentleness within ourselves just when we thought we had nothing left to give. I realised then that I don't know myself, or my husband, or anyone at all, really. What unexplored depths, what uncharted territories we contain.

The same thing applied to my "other" vocation: writing. What seemed at first like an insurmountable roadblock to being able to write, I now realise was the true beginning of my life as a writer. For now, at last, I was knee deep in life: ripped out of my comfort zone, I came face-to-face with human nature and love and all the ingredients a good writer needs to tell a meaningful story. Even though at first it deprived me of the time, freedom, and ability to concentrate that I needed to write, in the long run motherhood has made me a better observer of human nature. It has deepened my self-awareness, and enriched my interior life.

Sleep deprivation was one challenge, and sitting still to feed the baby was another. By my rough estimation, over the first year of my daughter's life, I spent approximately 875 hours, which is equal to 36 and a half days and nights, simply sitting still, staring into space, feeding her. If only I could write without using my hands, I used to think. Even reading was hard, because when you are nursing, it is tricky to hold a book, and the tiniest movement might upset the fragile peace of the balancing act you are engaged in, nurturing your child. Sometimes I caught myself not thinking about anything at all, and I worried that my brain was getting lazy, that it would begin to rot and that I wouldn't be able to find and sharpen it back up again for use when I next got around to trying.

But even this intense stillness and boredom is, it turns out, a training ground for imaginative thinking. Perhaps counter-intuitively, doing nothing with your mind for short periods of time can sometimes be the best kind of preparation for work such as writing. Research collected together in Manoush Zomorodi's book *Bored and Brilliant: How Time Spent Doing Nothing Changes Everything* suggests that our brains need a break "to stoke ingenuity", and that certain types of daydreaming can increase productivity and creativity. It also ingrains in you an intense form of mental endurance, which will be necessary to see any kind of complicated task like writing through to the finish.

The modern writer and mother Katy Carl describes how the parent who stays at home with small children needs to have "the patience of the surfer of the waves of boredom", "a kind of flow that transcends patience: an attentiveness to and delight in minutiae that others don't seem to notice." She quotes David Foster Wallace:

Bliss—a second-by-second joy and gratitude at the gift of being alive, conscious—lies on the other side of crushing, crushing boredom. Pay close attention to the most tedious thing you can find... and, in waves, a boredom like you've never known will wash over you and just about kill you. Ride these out and it's like stepping from black and white into color. Like water after days in the desert. Instant bliss in every atom.

Creativity, greater endurance, heightened powers of observation, and honest self-awareness: as I get older, I notice more and more touch points between writing and motherhood. In a mysterious way, I'm discovering that writing is training for mothering, and mothering is training for writing. I am not divided between two separate callings as I thought at first, because they are inseparable from each other. God has His eye on the bigger picture, and I can trust Him to make sense of it all in the long run.

Now, still in the early stages of motherhood with my second child, I usually write in short snatches. I've noticed that the best ideas come to me while I'm with the children and engaged in some repetitive task, my hands busy and my mind still. I'm learning to surf the waves of boredom, to look into the depths of the human soul without flinching, to observe quietly, to stop worrying that I'm getting behind or that I'll forget all my good ideas if I don't write them down right away.

As a kind and wise older mother-writer once told me, these early years of marriage and motherhood are a season of hidden growth; mysterious things are happening underground in my heart and mind right now. I may not see the fruit of it for many years, but I need to keep trusting that something is stirring inside me, that in God's divine economy nothing is wasted.

Marriage, motherhood, and the craft of writing constantly require me to surrender myself to the process, to accept slow and steady growth. In my relationship with my husband, my children, and with others and myself through my work, I feel called, again and again, to resist the urge to run away or turn inwards, to open my heart wider, and orient myself towards the other. It's in this act of surrender that I can most clearly hear God's voice, calling me onwards. And, it's in His presence as the source and summit of all creativity that I feel the various conflicting parts of me become whole, and I feel the great peace in the knowledge that He is the author of my life, and He knows what He's about.

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How to Be a Gentleman

WILLIAM R. HAMANT

Guzman, Sam, *The Catholic Gentleman: Living Authentic Manhood Today* (Ignatius Press, 2019).

With *The Catholic Gentleman*, Sam Guzman lends his voice to a conversation on masculinity at a time when the culture is vigorously involved in a fight (“debate” would be too restrained a word to do the situation justice) over the question of masculinity itself. It could not be more timely. As of this writing, for instance, the cover of *GQ*’s latest issue, “The New Masculinity,” features a man in a dress of sorts, while a father in Texas is fighting a legal battle against his ex-wife to prevent his seven-year-old son from undergoing gender re-assignment “therapy.” Yet Guzman does not directly engage such specific manifestations of deeper cultural confusion. Rather, he simply presents an alternative way to live and leaves it to his reader to determine which version of masculinity is more joyful, authentic, free, and consonant with human nature.

It is significant that Guzman speaks not of “masculinity,” but of being a “gentleman.” To be a “man” may be a given of nature, but it is not for that reason any less a task of culture or an imperative issued to the depths of conscience. Manhood has always been something learned from one’s father and the other men in the community, who have held out demanding objective standards for the maturing child to reach (Chapters 2, 10, and 12). Yet because genuine culture builds upon, and is an expression of, what is there by nature, these men are not forcing the boy to strive for something the boy himself is not made for. No one wants to stagnate in immaturity and mediocrity; all want a sufficient challenge so as to be able to become their authentic selves. In a word, we want to be true not just to who we are, but to who we should be (Chapter 1). And there is something in this mature masculinity that is simultaneously universal and unique, a harmony between the demands and expectations of the particular community and the particular gifts of the individual in that community (Chapters 9 and 25).

Of course, the “handing on” to and reception and appropriation of mature manhood by the next generation has never been perfect due to Original Sin (Chapter 9). But the fragmentation and dislocation of the family that began in the Industrial Revolution and spiked with the divorce culture has led to a situation today where there are fewer and fewer role models involved in boys’ lives over time, from whom they can learn what it is to be a man (Chapters 3 and 16).

It is precisely to such problems that Christianity offers a solution, proclaiming and safeguarding the dignity of the person called to love (Chapter 25). It is not incidental that Guzman speaks not only of the “gentleman,” but of the Catholic gentleman; for well does he know that one cannot speak of the cultural refinement of the man into a gentleman who radiates virtue without ultimately (and, in fact, at every step of the way) speaking of the ecclesial refinement of the sinner into the saint who radiates Christ. In this, there is a primacy of being over doing (Chapter 18), an idea that is also the driving force of Guzman’s chapter on the role of Mary in the Christian life: to love Mary is to grow in the simple receptivity of the child (Chapter 30).

At the same time, the act of renunciation is key to being a Christian gentleman (Chapter 32). “Becoming a man” requires an integration of suffering for the sake of growing stronger, and for the sake of transforming the world. Christian gentlemen, he says, know how to channel suffering into a creative power, so that suffering is not merely destructive (Chapter 13). Yet here he avoids falling into a kind of Pelagianism, for a large part of that suffering, Guzman suggests, is the suffering of our own weaknesses, which are a constant reminder of our insufficiency. This is for Guzman a word of hope, for Christ, he notes, had a special love for the weak and sinful, and our redemption comes not because He stands far off from this weakness, but precisely because He enters into it. “For God’s mercy,” Guzman writes beautifully, “is like a stream of water. It always rushes to the lowest place” (133).

On the whole, Guzman remains on the level of principles when treating of what it looks like concretely to be a “gentleman.” There is no one “model.” Rather, virtuous manhood can take forms as diverse as General George Patton or Mister Rogers (35). Of course, he says, to be a Christian gentleman one must look to Christ Himself, Who is the model par excellence (Chapter 28). Nevertheless, even Christ was subject to the particularities of his time and culture. If one wants to know what living like Christ “looks like” in another age and place, one can consider all the great saints who embodied Christ in their own way for their contemporaries. While not every attempt to instantiate masculinity is equally viable (36), nevertheless every man embodies

Christ uniquely: “What would Christ do now, in this time and place, in your circumstances? You are called to be transformed into Christ, to live his life after him, and to reveal the answer to that question to the whole world” (167).

Still, there are some things we can say of any who could be described as a “Catholic gentleman” (see, especially, Chapters 19, “The Spiritual Offices”, and 23, “What Is a Catholic Gentleman?”). The Catholic gentleman is devout, practicing his faith fully and fearlessly (Chapter 29). By virtue of his baptism, he bears a noble, three-fold mission of priest, prophet, and king. As prophet, he has the primary job of catechizing his children. His role is also “priestly”: he is called to sacrifice for others and to intercede on their behalf. Finally, the manly “priesthood” of self-sacrifice is “royal” because his kingship is meant to be one of service; the strength of his authority is a strength for others. True men, Guzman insists, are called to be “servant leaders” (127) and have a moral duty to protect those who are weaker (Chapter 15). So manliness does indeed mean strength and initiative; but it is the strength and initiative of gentleness and service. “What is impressive is the hulk of a man who can squat eight hundred pounds and still manage to set the barbell down lightly and carefully. His gentleness reveals his strength” (127).

Peppered throughout the text are chapters that are more topically specific. Chapter 11 is a bit of a crash course on the Theology of the Body, while Chapter 27 has some helpful words for those struggling with addiction to pornography. Chapter 6 expounds on the advice of St. Francis de Sales on how properly to dress in a way that expresses respect for oneself and others but doesn’t lead to pride. Similar in theme is Chapter 14, where Guzman argues that courtesy is the outward expression of respect for the dignity of the other even in the smallest details. Such chapters helpfully apply the principles from the rest of the text to some of the key issues that most men will likely confront at some point.

The only criticisms I have to offer of Guzman’s worthy text I am somewhat reticent to mention, as they are aimed at the very things that are the strengths of his approach. His role is not to offer an expansive treatise, but an introduction for those who are perhaps just beginning their own formation in the Christian faith. For this reason, he condenses as much content as he can into chapters of an appropriate length for his likely audience (on average just under five pages). Yet often this left me wishing he would go more deeply into his subject matter or offer a more developed, positive presentation in place of a lament over the present situation. In Chapter 16, for instance, he seems to focus entirely on the overwhelming challenges facing marriage today, while offering little concretely in the way of an alternative, such as expounding

on the beauty of marriage as it was made to be “in the beginning.”

One benefit of Guzman’s style, however, is that each chapter can stand rather on its own. A reader pressed for time can choose those chapters that seem most relevant to him, with virtually no impact on his ability to comprehend their content. But this also means—necessarily, I suspect—that the text has little by way of an overarching progression of thought that gives it unity. Still, I recognize that asking this of *The Catholic Gentleman* is to ask for something quite different from what Guzman is offering. His gift is to distill the riches of the faith into a drink that can be savored in small sips by those who are coming of age at a time of great confusion. I pray his work can help to bring the clarity that is so badly needed.

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Filling Heaven with God's Children: Priestly Celibacy and Paternity

KRISTIN AND NATHANIEL HURD

Griffin, Carther, *Why Celibacy? Reclaiming the Fatherhood of the Priest* (Emmaus Road Publishing, 2019).

Jesus calls his priest to be his co-worker in the Church, to fill Heaven with God's children.

—Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Why are a husband and wife, father and mother of a newborn daughter and preschool-aged son, reviewing a book on priestly celibacy and fatherhood? Because we are witnesses to what Father Carter Griffin proposes in *Celibacy? Reclaiming the Fatherhood of the Priest*.

Both of us discerned celibacy. Our many close priest, religious, and consecrated friends beautifully incarnate celibacy and are among the freest, most joyful people we know. These friends have educated us about the universality of spiritual paternity and maternity. Fr. Griffin's book taught us even more.

At a time like this, when scandal has “seriously weakened confidence in the wisdom of priestly celibacy,” Fr. Griffin contributes fresh insight on the reasons to keep the discipline. He does so by spotlighting supernatural paternity. With elegant, accessible language, he shows in only 161 pages how celibacy is inherently linked to a priest's supernatural fatherhood, and addresses common objections and the proposal of optional celibacy.

The author's life attests to his qualifications for this task. Fr. Griffin is rector of the St. John Paul II Seminary, a house of formation for the Archdiocese of Washington and other dioceses. He has been a formator at the seminary since 2011, including as vice rector and archdiocesan vocations director. Fr. Griffin converted to Catholicism in college and served for four years in the United States Navy as a line officer before entering seminary. He wrote his doctoral dissertation in 2011 on priestly celibacy, paternity, and masculinity.

Fr. Griffin is also a dear friend and spiritual father of our family. He prepared us for marriage, presided over our wedding, baptized our son, gives counsel, and regularly breaks bread with us. "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses," St. Pope Paul VI told the Pontifical Council for the Laity in October 1974. Fr. Griffin has witnessed to us what he teaches in this book.

Who is a priest? Our pastors and bishops are not managers or functionaries whom we occasionally look to for administrating programs. They are fathers who provide us with the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and confession. We also rely on them to intercede for us in prayer, to teach, guide, and correct us, protecting us from error by warning us boldly about external threats.

Our priests are also our brothers who need us. Priests learn to be fathers as much from the example of natural fathers as they do from their fellow priests. Encountering and being in relationship with the lay faithful help priests to be fully human. Moreover, lay people share with clerics Christ's offices of priest, prophet, and king through Baptism. Their holiness can educate and correct priests, especially when the devil tempts with pride.

How does celibacy fit in? Fr. Griffin argues the discipline is impossible to understand without seeing how it is ordered to supernatural fruitfulness. Fr. Griffin goes to the core: God the Father's celibate generation of the Son. Jesus is the one high priest. He was incarnated as a celibate man and as a celibate man generated the Church. "The priest's fatherhood [is] derived from his configuration to Christ the Head." Celibacy most closely approximates the paternity of the Father and the generative relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus incarnated that generation. He renounced natural marriage and family so that He could have an undivided heart for His sheep. Fr. Griffin quotes and echoes the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, who wrote in the decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*

that celibate priests “adhere to him [Christ] more easily with an undivided heart... dedicate themselves more freely in him and through him to the service of God and men, and...more expeditiously minister to his Kingdom and the work of heavenly regeneration.”

At times, when we hear the phrase “spiritual fatherhood or motherhood” we think of it as an abstract likeness or an emotional consolation for those unable to have children. Instead, Fr. Griffin clarifies that all human persons need to be generated at the biological, natural and supernatural, or “spiritual” levels. “A human child...[is] not born only to enjoy the goods of this world, but also—and even more so—to enjoy the imperishable goods of heaven. Every person is born for eternal life.” Therefore, interceding for our children, bringing them to the sacraments, and living our call to holiness is an even higher mission than toiling to keep them fed, rested, clothed and schooled.

The “undivided heart” of celibacy is about more than just having more minutes in the day for others. It is “a profound interior and spiritual availability,” exemplified in priests like St. John Vianney, the patron of parish priests. Having no natural wife calling him home was only partially what made him such an extraordinary instrument of God’s mercy in the confessional. Celibacy dilated his heart and prepared it to receive and give to others the fruits of contemplation. This is what all priests need to fulfill their three-fold office of sanctifying, teaching and shepherding, to offer people “Christ and the truth of the Gospel.” “The faithful expect only one thing from priests: that they be specialists in promoting the encounter between man and God,” as Pope Benedict XVI **reminded** Polish priests in 2006.

While offering a positive view of priestly celibacy, Fr. Griffin acknowledges the renunciation it entails. However, he reminds his readers that celibacy is a freely chosen sacrifice that participates in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, one which bears much fruit. Moreover, echoing Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, Preacher to the Papal Household, Fr. Griffin notes that the celibate renounces the exercise of sexuality, not sexuality as such: being male or female.

“Celibacy,” then, “is not the neutering of those who embrace it for the sake of the Kingdom; rather it is the channeling of their sexual energies toward higher goods.” Based partially on his own experience, Fr. Griffin explores how seminary can best form men in the chastity that harnesses those energies in well-ordered love (learning to guard against times of vulnerability and nourish oneself with exercise, exposure to beauty, a vibrant interior life, healthy relationships with friends and authority figures,

and the habits of regular confession, examination of conscience and small daily mortifications, among others).

The generous spirit developed by celibacy can also be an answer to some of the pitfalls of the priesthood. Fr. Griffin notes three of these to which today's priests are particularly prone: narcissism, clericalism, and activism. Narcissism is defined as an "excessive need for admiration...extreme sensitivity to criticism...a sense of entitlement... [and] craving for creaturely compensations, licit or illicit." Examples include alcoholism, careerism, pornography, illicit relationships, the undue craving for fancy meals, social events, lavish vacations, collections or hobbies. The narcissistic priest may also obsessively control his time, money, and space. Narcissism sometimes even drives a priest to personalize the Mass, "modifying the Church's liturgy to accommodate [his] theories or preferences."

Clericalism, says Fr. Griffin, is "the disordered preoccupation with one's clerical states and status...an elitist identification of authority with power rather than humility, with control rather than service." The clericalist priest forgets that "he is united to Christ primarily by the baptism that he shares with all believers, not by his ordination." Faux holiness, as well as the demand of disproportionate deference and obedience are all kinds of clericalism. When clericalism and temperamentality mix, "priests give free rein to their mood swings, forcing colleagues and parishioners to put up with their erratic feelings."

Activism "is an approach to the ministry that loses sight of its supernatural motive and source." It is exemplified by primarily focusing on "programs, tasks, administration, and other forms of measurable achievement." Fr. Griffin warns that "clericalism and activism...have this in common: both imagine that one can be a minister of Christ without being a disciple of Christ."

All of us, of course, are just as vulnerable to these pitfalls, or versions of them. As an antidote, Fr. Griffin encourages everyone to prioritize their "grace-filled interior life," and develop well-rooted friendships with others. Turning to priests, he encourages them to embrace their identity as supernatural fathers and to recognize that religious and laypeople are also instruments of grace for them. Fr. Griffin also encourages priests to develop deep, true friendships with brother priests and laymen, noting "the presbyteral brother provides a witness to other men that male friendship is still possible and even constitutive of a fulfilled life" "at a time with fewer male friendships."

One of the most baseless claims about celibate priests is they have nothing useful to show or say about marriage. As we have seen in our experience, paradoxically, priests can have more insight into the struggles and beauty of marriage than our fellow spouses. This flows from the amount of time they spend with many different couples, hearing confessions of countless others, going to confession themselves, their human formation, and, above all, groundedness in the spiritual life.

The witness of their faithfulness to the Lord in celibacy bolsters our fidelity to Him and each other. We are continually reminded to lay our lives down for each other and for others, living the “vocation to love,” as priests do. Their celibacy “reminds us true love is found not primarily in sexual activity but in the life of charity, which unites us to God and to one another and which alone satisfies the deep yearning for love and meaning that the sexual revolution promised, and failed to deliver.”

Fr. Griffin wrote his book on priestly celibacy for everyone, whatever his or her vocation and state of life. From our porch, Nathaniel looked up from the phrase “the father protects his children from their own misguided decisions” to see our son drinking muddy water from a kiddie pool and stop him. Both of us worked through it while we soothed our crying newborn daughter in a baby carrier, smiling as we looked at the title *Why Celibacy?* The text has nourished many rich conversations and will continue to animate our marriage, family, and friendships. We are grateful for the celibate priestly fatherhood of its author, our friend.

Kristin and Nathaniel Hurd live in Hyattsville, MD with their two children. She was a novice in Rome with the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo, an order reflecting the charism of the ecclesial movement *Communion and Liberation*. He began considering the priesthood immediately after becoming Catholic in 2005 and was a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Washington.

Swipe Right to Find Your Soul Mate

MICHAEL MOSS

Ansari, Aziz and Eric Klinenberg, *Modern Romance: An Investigation* (Penguin Books, reprinted ed. 2016).

Like any good stand-up comedian, Aziz Ansari is an intuitive student of the human condition. He wrote his book, *Modern Romance: An Investigation*, after he couldn't figure out how and when to communicate next with Tanya, a potential new romantic interest whom he wanted to see again. After texting her, Ansari experienced the anxiety that many iPhone users know all too well: "The madness I was descending into wouldn't have even existed twenty or even ten years ago. There I was, maniacally checking my phone every few minutes, going through this tornado of panic and hurt and anger all because this person hadn't written me a short, stupid message on a dumb little phone" (5). He wanted "a book that would help me understand the challenges of looking for love in the digital age," and not finding one, he teamed up with sociologist Eric Klinenberg to conduct an international research project on love and dating in the modern world. What he found is that the obvious changes in the dating playing field—those of technology and social media—have caused a not-so-obvious change: "Today, people spend years of their lives on a quest to find the perfect person, a soul mate. The tools we use on this search are different, but what has really changed is our desires and—even more strikingly—the underlying goals of the search itself" (6).

Compared to their grandparents, young adults are perfectionists in their search for someone who will complete them. Their marriages are like capstones to their young adult life. Whereas for previous generations marriage offered financial and social freedom apart from one's parents, contemporary young adults experience a phase that has been dubbed "emerging adulthood," a period of near-complete freedom and self-discovery. As a result, dating is no longer the means to marriage and adulthood, but

instead a fun way to enjoy being with romantic interests that might, at some future point, motivate a long-term commitment. Ansari notes the radical shift from “companionate marriage” in which two people recognize each other as qualified partners and work toward intimacy and love throughout the course of their married life, to a marriage of “soul mates”—that is, two people who perfectly complement each other’s project of self-actualization (22). Economic partnerships with qualified spouses are no longer satisfactory marriages, because what Ansari and his contemporaries are looking for in marriage is a perfect long-term soul mate. Ansari contrasts his own perfectionism with his father’s story. The elder Ansari met his wife as the third possible candidate for an arranged marriage. After confirming that “she was the appropriate height” and chatting for thirty minutes, he proposed marriage and she agreed (123). The ease with which the elder Ansari married (compared to Aziz’s interminable search for a wife) belies a generational shift in the way that marriage lends meaning to our lives. As ties to family, churches, neighborhoods and local social institutions have waned, young people are looking for one person to fulfill the role of a whole community. Aziz Ansari quotes psychotherapist Esther Perel: “So we come to one person, and we basically ask them to give us what an entire village used to provide: give me belonging, give me identity, give me continuity, but give me transcendence and mystery and awe all in one” (25). Rather than choosing spouses as complements to personal narratives that were largely received, young, isolated singles are forced to make radical mating decisions that will restructure their entire lives.

Recent technology has complicated the search for love by combining unlimited options with impersonal means of communication. This at once broadens the visible dating field while removing people from direct, honest communication with each other. Ansari worries that the popularity and ease of messaging allows people to avoid difficult face-to-face conversations and results in stunted social skills (41). This, in turn, forces young people to become even more reliant on texting for communication, making simple phone calls unusual enough to be a source of anxiety for many of them. Face-to-face-conversations, especially difficult breakups, force each person to confront the other’s emotions and practice empathy, whereas texting avoids any visceral encounter with the reality of another (195). It also allows people always to present their best side—never rushed or awkward, always composed. Furthermore, with in-person conversations and phone calls, the spoken words are only a small part of the information conveyed. Pitch, timing, pauses, and body language clarify meaning, even if unintentionally, and move the conversation forward. In an information-poor medium like texting, the sole two pieces of information—the content of the text itself and the time lapsed between messages—become excessively

scrutinized (47). During the initial stages of a relationship, translating this information becomes a complicated, stressful dynamic in itself.

Dating services are the new matchmakers. Between 2005 and 2012, one-third of couples met via online dating sites. “No other way of establishing a romantic connection has ever increased so far, so fast” (84). Ansari is writing in 2014, as dating apps (rather than websites) are beginning to take off. Now, in late 2019, these apps are ubiquitous among young adults. This change occurred alongside the continued decline of traditional mediators of socialization and dating: family connections, schools, churches, workplaces, neighborhoods and social organizations. People have access to a near-infinite number of strangers, with nothing connecting them except a user interface and algorithm. While this situation grants unprecedented options, it also requires tremendous effort to find meaningful connection. Polls of millennials estimate that they now spend an average of ten hours each week on dating apps. Those apps are designed to turn a profit, not improve their users’ lives, so they embed the same addictive technology that makes social media a black hole of time consumption. Given the powerful human drives involved in dating, it’s unsurprising that visually stimulating apps that dangle the prospect of romantic liaison draw in countless users for significant amounts of time.

Ansari is an observant researcher, and he provides useful tips for avoiding the pitfalls of the emergent dating scene. At the same time, he appears unable to step out of the system and critique activities that are clearly not healthy or normal. He wants every fun-loving single to have their cake and eat it too, which he hopes will only require a slight adjustment of outlook and texting habits. As a result, his concluding advice fails to step beyond obvious slogans: “Treat potential partners like actual people, not like bubbles on a screen.” Ansari’s main message seems to be that “romance is complicated but things seem to work better if you invest a little bit more time.” This is a disappointingly weak conclusion from an insightful survey of a burned-out dating landscape. Ansari’s unwillingness to connect trends of dysfunctional behavior stunts the book’s potential to improve lives. He criticizes the frequency of crude sexual requests on dating apps, but he treats the frequency of teenage sexting (and its companions: sexual manipulation and abuse) as a new, normal step toward adult sexuality. Despite nudges from friends and family toward a conception of relationships premised on self-gift and hopeful commitment, Ansari is too committed to cultural relativism (perhaps because of the stark contrast between his lifestyle and that of his parents) to explicitly criticize the darker aspects of the modern dating scene. It is perhaps not surprising that since writing the book, Ansari was the object of a

controversial #MeToo article, in which an anonymous “Grace” described a disappointing date with Aziz, where she felt forced into sexual activity. In *Modern Romance*, Ansari lays out the practices and interests of young adults looking for romance with great humor and insight. But if readers want incisive cultural criticism from him, they will be disappointed.

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A Man in Part: The Decline of the Western Male

ANDREW SHIVONE

Cross, Gary W., *Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Immaturity* (Columbia University Press, 2008).

In the opening scene of Peter Jackson's 2018 World War I documentary, *They Shall Not Grow Old*, we hear the voices of veterans recounting their experiences as infantry soldiers on the front lines. What's remarkable is not the horrors of war they describe, but how simply and laconically the men speak of what they lived through. Surprisingly, most of the men look with some fondness on their experience and, though they surely bore both psychological and physical scars from their time, do not seem to expect any pity or overwhelming praise. Though Jackson's selections might have been judiciously chosen in order to present a hagiography of World War I veterans, it is clear that these men did not think that they deserved great praise or even think that they did anything remarkable. As one of the men recounts, "There was a job to be done; we just went on and did it."

It would be difficult to imagine most young men from this generation or those recently past reacting in such a way. There are, of course, those from our current generation who have offered sacrifices for their country willingly and without complaint. In terms of social expectations, however, young men are typically no longer expected to be the aggressive guardians and protectors of their communities. What, then, has happened to men over these past hundred years? Gary Cross, Associate Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania, attempts to trace the rapid change in men from stoic providers, protectors, and soldiers to irresponsible and cynical "boy-men."

Cross finds the origins of this massive cultural shift in the Industrial Revolution. Where men had previously spent the day at home on the farm or in the shop, modern

men left their homes for over 12 hours each day in order to provide for their family. The role of the father, consequently, underwent a radical shift from household authority to absent provider. The father in pre-Industrial ages was far more “hands-on” in the daily formation of his children, deeply immersed in everything from “discipline to character building and job training.” By contrast, the modern man’s role in the home was relegated to the waning evening hours. Except for household tasks and bread-winning, men had become incidental to the internal life of the family. The history of modern men is, therefore, a history of men and society at large attempting to address the problems generated by the Industrial Revolution.

With the rise of Industrial and post-Industrial society, there was also a corresponding loss of benefit to becoming a “man,” less “payoff for male maturity,” than in previous eras. Previously, to be a man among men had come with social and familial benefits that adolescence could not provide. The most distinct of these advantages was that men were granted social and political authority. Men lived in a world “where there was deference to family heads, and access to law and public resources” from which young men were excluded. Further, men were admitted to a wider social acceptance when they achieved a certain degree of maturity. In the modern age, becoming a man seems to have no benefit in terms of family or social life. If nothing is gained by becoming a mature man, why do it?

At the same time, as the significance of becoming a “man” in society declined, the benefits of childhood increased. “Being a kid,” Cross writes, “has become much more satisfying than it was in the past when the young submitted to their elders and did without while the aged had distinct privileges.” Men of the modern era have, therefore, rejected the values and patterns of their fathers in favor of more freedom and less responsibility. The sexual revolution of the 1960’s was not, as is often asserted, a break from the immediate past but the fulfillment of a movement that had started a century earlier. What has resulted is a generation of “boy-men” who see no benefit “in the self-denying setting of marriage and family life.”

This trend was accelerated by “makers of modern consumer and media culture” who had “learned to feed on this rejection of past models...and the desire to retain childhood.” The social scientists and manipulators of Madison Avenue quickly recognized that there was an ennui deep in the modern male psyche and that a good ad would be able not only to exploit but exacerbate men’s dissatisfaction. We can see this shift quite clearly in the way cars have been advertised. Taking a cue from **Neil Postman**, Cross analyzes Buick ads from the 60’s and notices that they focus on either status (“People will think you were promoted before you really were”) or responsibility

(“The wife won’t have to worry”). Compare this to the typical car ads of the 1990’s: “A G.I. Joe figure driving a miniature Nissan through a kids’ playroom meets a Barbie in a doll house...and races off to the line, ‘Enjoy the Ride.’” Both ads are directed to middle-aged, middle-income men, yet they appeal to radically different motivations. In the former, manhood is associated with success and responsibility; in the latter, it is associated with unencumbered freedom and sexual attraction. Which of these, Cross wants us to ask, is more mature?

Movies and television give more evidence of this shift. For example, Cross takes the Andy Hardy movies as paradigmatic of what the 1930’s and 40’s considered to be the ideal father and man. Judge Hardy was a “wizened, kindly, and firm” leader who took his familial responsibilities seriously. Because of this, he had to behave in a dignified and responsible way. Despite his soft demeanor, there is no question that Judge Hardy was a man who guided his son, Andy, through the pains of adolescence so that he too might become a lawyer and responsible father. Nor is there any question that Andy himself desired to be like his father. Though he faltered, Andy grew in manhood and maturity.

It is easy to contrast this with modern images of fatherhood. Instead of wizened, if somewhat bland and anodyne, men of responsibility like Judge Hardy, our models are men like Adam Sandler in *Big Daddy* (2000) and Hugh Grant in *About a Boy* (2002). In both cases, these middle-aged men desperately avoid any responsibility or authority. They take pride in their rejection of paternal roles in society or family and pleasure in remaining perpetual adolescents. Though both end up learning some measure of responsibility, they are only able to connect and relate to the respective children in their care by “accentuating their own immaturity.” They become paradoxical anti-authoritarian authority figures.

The narrative Cross builds is compelling. It is hard to read the book without feeling that a great loss has taken place. There is a nagging question, however, throughout the book which he is aware of but assiduously avoids answering: What is a man? Cross makes clear that he rejects any “essentialist arguments” about manhood or maturity but is simply examining the decline of certain socio-cultural norms in contemporary culture. The decline of these norms has meant a loss of place and status for men that we, as a culture, must find a way to deal with by inventing “new” forms of maturity and responsibility. At times, Cross takes a moralistic tone towards these “boy-men,” but in the end must admit that “manhood” is merely a cultural construct that changes from era to era. One cannot help but ask: If this is the case, why does it

matter? If we cannot make any determination about what men are and, therefore, what they should do, how can we possibly make any judgment about the “decline” of manhood? Could we not equally view these changes as entirely positive? Without any explicit philosophical anthropology, all Cross can do is comment on the action from the sidelines. He tells us what has happened but not what to make of it.

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Finding Meaning in Communion

MARCIE STOKMAN

Esfahani Smith, Emily, *The Power of Meaning: Finding Fulfillment in a World Obsessed with Happiness* (Broadway Books, 2017).

Heading by train to New York City, I read Emily Esfahani Smith's *The Power of Meaning: Finding Fulfillment in a World Obsessed with Happiness*. Smith's weaving of research, interviews and stories validates the deep human need for something more than a life of comfort, ease and pleasure. As I read, I realized the importance of not avoiding, but rather "embracing the awkward," difficult, and even painful situations in order to experience greater meaning.

Smith identifies four themes prevalent in the lives of those who live meaningful lives: First, knowing a deep sense of belonging; second, having a purpose in life that is tied with contributing to society; third, making sense of one's own journey through storytelling; and, finally, recognizing transcendence, which is to say, connecting to something bigger than the self.

These pillars—belonging, purpose, storytelling and transcendence—are central to all the major religions, and, according to Smith,

they are the reason why those traditions historically conferred (and continue to confer) meaning in people's lives. They situate individuals within a community. They give them a purpose to work toward, like growing closer to God, or serving others. They offer them explanations for why the world is the way it is.... And they provide them with opportunities for transcendence through rituals and ceremonies. (41-42)

In developed countries such as the United States, shared experiences of communal life

are dwindling. Many of us have hundreds of connections on social media yet do not attempt to know our neighbors or the person next to us in the pew. Smith's four pillars show that this path to meaning, which may have played a greater part for communities in the past, is still possible. Even though "we may move from one city to another, change jobs, and lose touch with friends as the years go by," we can choose "to harness the pillars in new ways in our new circumstances," (42). In my own work as founder of **Well-Read Mom** book club, I'm seeing a revival of sorts. With the diminishing of community, women are being intentional in seeking out face-to-face community that feeds their souls. WRM book clubs parallel Smith's four pillars as we read stories, compare them with our own life experiences, and accompany one another in our personal growth. Women are faithful to their book club because of their shared sense of belonging.

In the chapter entitled "Belonging," Smith verifies this need for connection, saying that, quite literally, we need connection with others or we die. From the orphanages of old where babies went untouched and died, to our highly developed countries today where isolation and suicide are on the rise, the need for relationship and belonging is essential.

In "Purpose," she talks about the power of a "service mindset" to give meaning to jobs that don't seem objectively rewarding. Smith recounts an anecdote about John F. Kennedy: "When the president asked [the janitor at NASA] what he was doing, the janitor apparently responded, 'helping put a man on the moon'" (95-96). This ability to see seemingly mundane tasks as connected to a broader purpose is critical to finding purpose. If we can see the persons behind day-to-day tasks, we too can experience the power of a service mindset to make our lives meaningful.

In "Storytelling," one particularly interesting study cited the power of a story to reframe the experience of loss. Researchers asked individuals to imagine "what could have been." Despite the pain of imagining these "lost selves," the process helped the participants in the study to reconcile their present lives to their past and move to a deeper place of acceptance. Somehow, this careful examination of ourselves in the context of a story is critical to our own development and fulfillment, something I see many of our Well-Read Moms experiencing.

In the chapter entitled "Transcendence," Smith talks about looking at the night sky and feeling insignificant in the face of it. But in fact "a brush with mystery—whether underneath the stars, before a gorgeous work of art, during a religious ritual, or in the hospital room—can transform us" (131). It brings forth questions like, Who made us?

How is it that the universe is so vast and I'm so small? What is the reason for it all? This is the power of transcendence, to "go beyond" or to "climb." That is, the veil is lifted for a moment from our everyday reality and we experience a glimpse of something, or dare we say, Someone greater.

After a chapter on each of these four pillars, Smith addresses "Growth," and how it is that some people experience increased meaning in life while others seem to lose hope in the face of loss, trauma, or adversity. Offering a blueprint for those struggling to find hope and purpose, Smith shows how reframing adversity as opportunity can make one more resilient. Individuals who are able to see opportunity, rise above the struggle by essentially finding ways to work their trauma through the four pillars.

In Smith's concluding chapter, she brings her story full circle with Viktor Frankl's revelation in *Man's Search for Meaning*: "Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love." As Smith says, "Love, of course, is at the center of the meaningful life. Love cuts through each of the pillars of meaning" (229).

As I read Smith's book I understood that seemingly small, but intentional everyday interactions matter. Making eye contact with the checkout lady at the gas station or engaging in a conversation with the person next to me at the ball game or in the pew is not insignificant. Smith makes the point that these simple exchanges enhance the quality of our lives. They increase our participation in meaning.

I closed the book and exited my train amidst the bustle of Grand Central Station. There, in the middle of the rush stood a homeless woman on a pile of newspapers. Her feet were swollen, cracked and bleeding. With her over-sized coat, flowered hat, and heap of bags she was impossible to miss, as she hollered out crazy things from her pedestal. Yet people scurried by as if she were completely invisible.

Because I had been reading Smith's book I was more aware than usual. I stopped and looked at this woman. Our eyes locked. She saw me and I saw her. Both of us knew we had been seen. Her ranting quieted. After a few seconds, I waved to her and turned to catch the next train. She cupped her hands and shouted at me, "You're precious, you're precious!" I turned, and again we locked eyes. Being seen by another person is powerful. Even if brief, it is a moment of meaning.

Walking on the streets of Manhattan, I looked up at a billboard showing a teenage boy inserting his Air Pods. The headline read, "Avoid the Awkward." I was aware of Smith's advice which was just the opposite. She encourages one to "embrace the

awkward,” not avoid it. The modern temptation to isolate ourselves from one another is prevalent. On the other hand, where I live in a small Minnesota town, the awkward is hard to avoid even with Air Pods. It is impossible for me to go into the local grocery store without talking to someone I know by name. I understand this is a gift for me.

Becoming aware of ways we might, even unknowingly, construct barriers to avoid awkward exchanges in the name of efficiency or personal space is the first step toward change. Cultivating connections, even small ones, can make a difference, not just personally but in the community as a whole.

In her conclusion, Smith quotes from George Eliot’s novel *Middlemarch*:

But the effect of her [Dorothea’s] being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

A surprising thing about small interactions where we connect with and affirm another person is that these exchanges have the potential to ripple out, becoming, as Eliot wrote, incalculably diffusive.

In my own life, I find that if I chase happiness, it usually eludes me. If, instead, I seek meaning and invest in relationships of belonging and purpose, my day-to-day tasks take on a broader mission. Surprisingly, in the process, happiness finds me. This is what Smith’s research confirms. The shift from a happiness mindset to a meaning mindset is at the heart of living a fulfilling life. The genius of her work is sharing the hope and truth that everyone can experience an increase in meaning, and that “humble acts...taken together, light up the world.”

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Healing the Wounds of the Church

LOUIS ROULEAU

Barron, Bishop Robert, Letter to A Suffering Church: A Bishop Speaks on the Sexual Abuse Crisis (Word on Fire, 2019).

The sexual abuse crisis that has unfolded in recent years within the Church in the United States and around the world has caused a grave wound. Believers and non-believers alike have been, in turn, shocked, disgusted, angered, and saddened by the actions of abusive clergy and the repeated failure of Church leaders to protect vulnerable children, to punish the offenders, and to remove them from ministry. The word Bishop Robert Barron uses to speak of this wound is “lacerating,” and it is fitting, for it is a wound that cuts deeply to the core of the Church’s mission and identity.

Much has been written about the scope and causes of the abuse crisis, and many proposals have been made for reforming the structures that enabled such behavior to continue undetected and undeterred for years. However, few have spoken with such empathy and directness as Bishop Barron does in his Letter to a Suffering Church. This short book is truly a pastoral one in which Barron speaks from the heart and not, as so many bishops have, through the mediation of lawyers and public relations consultants. It is a “cri de coeur, a cry from the heart,” addressed to those who would shake the dust from their feet and walk away from the Church in despair. Who could blame them after so much pain, deceit, and obfuscation? And yet, there is a compelling reason to stay and fight, Barron insists, because the Church is the bearer of a precious treasure, albeit one carried in fragile earthen vessels.

Barron describes the abuse of minors by clergy as the devil’s masterpiece. It has caused untold suffering and tremendous human devastation, especially because the perpetrators of these acts of violence were God’s ministers. Those who represent the goodness and mercy of God by virtue of being conformed to Christ through the

sacrament of holy orders brought instead harm and pain, and those who were given a sacred mandate to guard the flock were complacent and complicit. As a pastor, Barron has heard the cries of the faithful: “In their bitter words and their even more bitter tears, I would sense both a deep love for the Church and a practically bottomless disillusionment with it” (13).

How are we to find our bearings and come to some understanding of this crisis in order to find a way forward? Barron’s analysis takes a two-pronged approach: he first looks at the sexual abuse crisis in the light of Scripture and then examines it historically. Even as the Bible affirms a covenantal and life-giving vision of human love and sexuality, it also depicts sex after the Fall as an instrument of “domination or manipulation;” when it is distorted, “sexuality becomes a vivid countersign of the divine” (20). Among the passages that Barron highlights, two stand out in particular: Eli, the high priest, failed to act against his sons Hophni and Phineas, whose corruption included sexually abusing the women who worked at the meeting tent, and David used his kingly power to cover up his affair with Bathsheba. In both cases, disregard for God’s law brought punishment and destruction. In contrast to these icons of abuse, Barron upholds Jesus’ own relation to children (see Mt 18): “the child—humble, simple, self-effacing—functions as a sort of iconic representation of the divine Child of the divine Father” (35). In fact, Jesus’ harshest words are directed to those who would cause harm to children.

When Barron turns to the history of the Church for insight, he draws two significant conclusions. First, the Church has always contended with evil in its midst. “The Church, from the very beginning and at every point in its development,” Barron writes, “has been marked to varying degrees by sin, scandal, stupidity, misbehavior, misfortune, and wickedness” (41). Indeed, some of the most eloquent passages from the letters of St. Paul were occasioned by the immorality and abuse present within the community of believers. Familiarity with the history of the Church reveals many instances of poor clerical discipline and a long list of corrupt and sinful popes, some of whom Barron describes in detail. “We’ve been here before,” he observes. Not only has the Church survived numerous examples of scandal, but more importantly, the Church’s own history reveals that the holiness of the Church is the holiness of Christ. For this reason, the Second Vatican Council spoke of the Church as a mixed body, “at once holy and always in need of purification,” whose continual path is that of penance and renewal (*Lumen Gentium*, 8). The second lesson from Church history that Barron draws is that alongside the scoundrels and sinners, the Church has also nurtured many strong voices who have opposed the corruption and laxity of ecclesiastical

leaders (think here of Peter Damian, Dante, Chaucer, and Erasmus) and, most importantly, produced many saints whose holiness reflects God's beauty and glory. Barron eloquently invokes these holy women and men as shining lights in the Church's history. On this note, I would draw the reader's attention to the weekly general audiences of Pope Benedict XVI, which I always understood to be part of his pastoral response to the sexual abuse crisis.[1] In 170 addresses delivered between March 2006 and April 2011, he chronicled the unfolding of sanctity in the lives of the great saints and theologians of the Church in an effort to show "how it is precisely the light of the [Face of Christ] that is reflected on the face of the Church (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1), notwithstanding the limits and shadows of our fragile and sinful humanity." [2]

For Barron, the reason we need to stay in the Church is that it remains the place of encounter between our wounded humanity and the life-giving love of the Triune God, who in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has reconciled the world to himself and overcome all suffering and abuse. The Church offers us the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and calls each of us to grow in holiness. Institutional reforms such as the Dallas Charter can only go so far; it is the spiritual reform of holiness that will reinvigorate both the priesthood and the laity and thus ultimately heal the wound caused by abuse. "If we want holier priests," Barron insists, "we all have to become holier ourselves." What the Church needs most of all is a new St. Benedict, a new St. Francis, and a new St. Ignatius. These, he believes, are already being fashioned by the Holy Spirit within the bosom of the Church.

[1] For an overview of these general audiences, see my article "Holiness and the History of the Church in Benedict XVI's General Audiences," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 17:3 (Summer 2014): 158-173.

[2] Benedict XVI, General Audience, "Christ and the Church," March 15, 2006.

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