

MALE SPIRITUALITY

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My Father's House

Foreword

A phenomenon known as the men's movement is emerging in America. Promise Keepers, St. Joseph's Men, the Men's Cursillo Movement, the Men's Cornerstone Retreat, and My Father's House' Men's Discipleship Group are all part of this distinct process and the evolution of a distinctly masculine spirituality. The process of defining and redefining what is a distinctly male spirituality is underway with intensity. Both in gatherings and in solitary reflection, there is a hunger within men to understand, to define, and to live the potential of their masculine spirit. Questions of identification, empowerment, connection, development, and relationships take on greater importance as men seek a paradigm for masculine living.

A Past Paradigm

Patriarchy, or the rule of the fathers, had been the source of critical reflection since the rise of modern feminism who have assailed the damaging historical consequences of it. Men studies are now offering wise reflections on the effects of patriarchy upon the psychological development and socialization of young men. The modern men's movement, therefore, has both critics and supporters. Many would argue that men have always been on top and, therefore, don't need any further advantage.

A new term, 'mysandry' or the prejudice against the masculine has been added to the lexicon of gender studies. In certain feminist circles, anything that touches upon the masculine in academic or political circles is suspect. The Men's Movement seeks to address such inaccurate and prejudicial philosophies with an honest critique of the abuses of the male dominant society of the past. It is our purpose to view the men's movement as a complementary movement of the Spirit to encourage more authentic and life-giving connections between men and women.

Radical feminists are not the only critics of the Men's Movement. The challenge of the Men's Movement to commonly held assumptions about "manliness" engages men in a dialogue about its very meaning.

What the Men's Movement Should Not Be

The Men's Movement is certainly not a new form of machoism nor a push to gather neurotic young executives together to overcome the problems of greed and power in offices almost everywhere. Nor is it a push to create sensitive new age guys. Rather, the Men's Movement is a push to reflect upon the connection between a man and the depths

of his own male soul while actively participating in the core issues of today. Therefore, it is a movement to find out what is real male spirituality.

What Does An Authentic Spirituality For Men Look Like?

Perhaps more to the point, how does spirituality that is centered in truly masculine imagery allow men not only deeper access to God, but also to their roles as sons, brothers, husbands, fathers, friends, and disciples. The battle for the spiritual man is always within himself. Today we are seeing the sad results of past failures to prepare men for life. When Christianity no longer teaches and defines male spirituality, a vacuum is created – a vacuum that the media, the culture, and the world at large is all too ready to fill. The effects are all around us. Legitimated and even glorified violence, compulsive addictions, breakup of families and whole life, and a common inability for men to really believe in themselves, others and life in general are causes for this vacuum.

The Media

The media, unfortunately more than any other institution, is a formant not only of the American soul but also of the American male soul. The type of men glorified by the media are the Rambos, the Tom Cruises, the John Waynes, the Clint Eastwoods, the James Bonds. Ruggedly individualistic, often violent, most often promiscuous, seldom religious, and even more seldom truly responsible when it comes to family life in general and women in particular. It is a shame that visitors to the United States soon learn that they can enter almost any masculine circle if they simply can discuss football or baseball and tell off-colored jokes. Such a shallow world view, indeed!

The Shallow Masculine

In their book, *The Wild Man's Journey*, Fr. Richard Rohr and Fr. Joseph Martos offer a model for male spirituality. They talk about what they call the shallow masculine, where a man tends to be the *tough guy*. He rejects any character traits that are sensitive or caring, for such are perceived to be weak. He exemplifies the cruder, macho and sexist attitudes prevalent in the media today. Unfortunately, many men enter in to the shallow masculine and remain there, since this is the only model of manliness they have. Any notion of sensitivity is rejected with scorn as being appropriate only for sissies.

The Four Journeys of the Man

What we are learning from both sound families and Christian spirituality is that there are ideally four journeys of a man, consistent with Shakespeare's four stages. First, there is daddy's and mommy's little boy. This is such an important stage when the young child is fathered and mothered by truly sensitive and caring parents. Affirmation by these significant others is so vitally important. Otherwise, the young boy would be left with what is now called a father wound or a mother wound. Unfortunately, in our culture, the majority of boys suffer from a father wound, most especially in the black community, where the father is either absent or a poor role model.

The second stage is that of the independent young man wherein the young teenager has been affirmed enough to stand on his own and become his own person. This, too, is an

important stage. If it is not entered into gracefully, the young boy may remain a mother's boy, insecure of making real decisions on his own.

The third journey is the journey into his feminine soul called *anima* by Carl Jung. This is the journey the young man makes when he begins to fall in love. Suddenly, he begins to comb his hair, take a shower and dress up. He even learns to dance and to speak more politely and sensitively. Most times, he falls in love.

During this stage, he acquires more feminine virtues of sensitivity, caring, gentleness, and intuition. He loses some of his interest in sports, and is more open to art, poetry, and more relational aspects of his personality. It is in this stage that he begins to understand and accept traits and drives within that have been repressed or rejected. Empathy, intuition, receptiveness, tenderness, and similar traits more commonly associated with women are developed. The first attempts at connection with the feminine occur in external relationships with mothers, girlfriends, wives, and so forth.

Rohr and Martos have labeled this stage as the journey of John the Beloved. This biblical imagery typifies a man who has accepted both his need for and his ability to be both feeling and expressive. If a man does not enter into this stage, he remains in the grip of the shallow masculine. If he travels only on this journey, his life loses balances and some acquire effeminate, even weak traits. Many men allow a domineering woman – wife, girlfriend or mother – to make all the important decisions for them. They do not wear the pants or are not the head of the house. When a man is in the grip of what is now called the shallow feminine, he can be portrayed as “a soft man”, one so in touch with his feelings that he can't escape from them. He has no focus, determination, self-confidence or inner authority. In short, he has become a wimp and not a man. It is true he is not macho, but neither is he truly male.

So there is a fourth journey into his redeemed masculine – he become a gentleman, a man of steel and velvet. He now has a well-developed *animas*, as well as a well-developed *anima*. He is both strong and caring, both stern and tender, both prosaic and poetic, individualistic and personalistic. He can both lead and be led. In short, he is a gentleman. Unfortunately, role models of the wise old man or the gentleman are not too forthcoming in our culture. Jesus was a gentleman and Lincoln was a man of steel and velvet, so strong and yet so compassionate. Fortunately, for me, so was my father.

This fourth journey Rohr and Martos have called the journey of John the Baptist. Now acquainted with his inner feminine, the man moves toward deeper psychic energies which will thrust him toward completeness and balance. In other words, he has traveled from the surface masculine through the shallow feminine and back into his deep masculine. As Rohr and Martos note, the deep masculine can be misunderstood as it appears as a heightened version of the shallow masculine. Independence can be mistaken for arrogance, assertiveness for aggressiveness, focus for stubbornness, while strength of character can be misunderstood as domination. The crucial distinction, however, is that a man cannot enter into his deep masculine energies unless he has already experienced a union with his feminine qualities. Ongoing relationships that are real and tender with

women will keep a man empathetic and so enable him to build, nurture and sustain himself as a co-creator both with God and with women.

Trying to Define The Male Soul

Rather than trying to define the male soul, perhaps we can talk about certain descriptive generalities between men and women. No man would completely embody all masculine traits, nor would a woman embody all the feminine traits. In fact, the very point we are making – that is that a person becomes spiritually mature – they learn to embellish the more surface or shallow parts of their personality.

Men tend to be concerned with generalities, women with details. Men seek status through power, women through affection. Men's interests tend to be centered upon his work (outside the home), women's interests tend to be centered upon her family (inside the home). Men tend to be analytical and logical, women intuitive. Men tend to be stern, women tender. Men tend to be passionate, women romantic. Men tend to be prosaic, women poetic. Men tend to be thing-minded, women person-minded. Men tend to be individualistic, women more social. Men tend to be ego-centric, women more altruistic. Men tend to be realistic, women more idealistic. Men tend to lead, women to be led. Men tend to be content with routine, women with variety and the colorful. Men tend to be more conceited, women more jealous. Men tend to be pugnacious, women tenacious. Men tend to be secretive, women more talkative. Men tend to be systemic and methodical, while women often make judgements on the feelings for people at hand.

The Sensitive Man

Writers differ on their understanding of the sensitive man. Radical feminists point out that men have often been so concerned with their own desires that they forget the value and presence of women. As men undertake the task of understanding and reconstructing their own persona, questions about sensitivity arise. In his book, *The New Adam*, Philip Culbertson identifies the masculine in masculine spirituality as "that which is appropriate to those males who have seriously taken the opportunity for their own liberation from gender stereotypes, and have, in the process, begun to seek a new and more sensitive self understanding in the light of feminist critique." (*The New Adam*, pp. 110-111)

Throughout his work, Culbertson idealizes the sensitive man as the goal for masculine development. He defines the sensitive man as one who is aware of the full range of his emotions, comfortable with his body, able to relate in ways that are both masculine and feminine, not afraid of women, and willing to work with them as equal partners. Authentic male spirituality, therefore, must address twelve stumbling blocks.

- The identification of God as Father.
- The fear of the feminine.
- The domination by tradition-centered males of literature in theology and spiritual direction.
- The suppression of the broad range of human emotions.
- The valuation of self-sufficiency.
- The misunderstanding of reciprocal relationships.

- The insistence that “doing” is more manly than “being.”
- The problem of men not knowing who they are when they aren’t in charge.
- The heritage of body-soul dualism and the dismissal of body and sexuality.
- The need to control the valuation of hierarchy, the fear of chaos and spontaneity.
- The assumption that incompleteness or an unpredictable result is a sign of failure.
- The preference for linearity over circularity, as conditioned by male anatomy and phallogocentrism.

Culbertson’s thesis is similar to that of most post-feminist theologians. He writes, “We already know from the proper feminist critique of our inheritance what damage macho self-centeredness, conformity, and anti-intellectualism can produce. Instead of seeking the wild man within, sensitive men should seek to nurture and facilitate.” (Ibid p. 111) It is his dream to see more men move toward sensitivity than wildness.

A Different Approach

Patrick M. Arnold takes a different track in this development of the man in his book, *Wildman, Warriors, and Kings: Masculine Spiritual and the Bible*. He writes, “... the Christian Church along with much of Western culture is presently experiencing a transition from centuries of static masculinity (patriarchy) to dynamic femininity (feminism); this movement is as inevitable as the tides and it cannot be stopped: the feminine is ascendant, the masculine in decline. This, too, shall pass... Masculinity itself is under attack, and not only in its negative shadow, but in its most positive qualities, too.” (Ibid. p. 51)

Arnold argues that men are created to be wildmen, the image that Culbertson rejects. He justifies this by looking to the Old Testament images of patriarchs, prophets, warriors, magicians, and kings. He, too, lists four moments in the spiritual journey. His first stage is that of the “static feminine.” This stage can connect the man primarily to his mother. In the second stage, he is called to move on to the stage of the “dynamic masculine” where separation and differentiation away from the static feminine occurs. In this stage the first thrust of masculinity is experienced and the young man connects with the outside world as “man.” The third stage is that of the “static masculine.” This is established as man settles down and creates institutions that can be maintained against the vicissitudes of time. The final stage is that of the “dynamic feminine.” At this stage, the man develops his sense of depth and connects with wisdom, beauty and art. Arnold sees the absolute necessity for man to be connected with his depths, his feelings and his body.

Both Arnold and Culbertson emphasize the importance of men assembling together for support and guidance. Culbertson sees men striving to become more sensitive, while Arnold calls men to discover ways that are related that are rooted in hearty masculine challenge and support. As the old song goes, “Give me some men who are stout hearted men and I’ll soon give you ten thousand more.” Arnold holds that given the lack of authentic fathering, most boys should be led to develop life-giving and power-producing rights whereby the boy becomes a man. He offers the following ways that young men should be introduced into a masculine spirituality.

- Initiation rites
- Missionary outreach
- Pilgrimage
- Masculine-based liturgy and preaching
- Masculine prayer and devotions
- Men's discussion and support groups
- Church reforms away from its dominate feminist culture

The Problem

This brief contrast demonstrates that Culbertson and Arnold recognize the same problem, the lack of an authentic male spirituality and its devastating impact on both men and women. Culbertson shys away from that which Arnold advocates. He calls for sensitive men to emerge in society, whereas Arnold calls for men possessed with a vibrant masculine spirit to return to the wisdom of their archetypal heritage and potential. Culbertson declares the necessity for men to develop images other than the Father God, while Arnold invites men to become in touch with the masculine images in worship. Culbertson is delighted with the increased feminism in the Church, while Arnold denounces it.

Evolution of Masculine Spirituality

Both men and women are aware that images of masculinity defined by contemporary culture are inadequate and surface. Gathered together in groups, lodges, forums, prayer circles, and movements, men have undertaken a quest to recover authenticity, love, passion, integrity, justice and hope for the masculine soul.