

WHAT FATHER REALLY MEANS: THE CHALLENGE OF UNDERSTANDING
DIVINE SONSHIP TO FIGHT THE CULTURE OF FATHERLESSNESS

by

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Introduction

On January 30th, 2013, Pope Benedict XVI gave a Wednesday General Audience focused on the first tenet of the Creed, “I believe in one God, the Father almighty”. He began by saying, “Thus, I would like to reflect with you now on the first and fundamental definition of God which the Creed presents to us: he is Father.”¹ Within the audience, he illustrated the image of God the Father present in biblical revelation beginning with the Old Testament and culminating with the Gospels. He acknowledged, however, that fatherhood is a difficult topic of discussion, particularly in the Western world due to problematic experiences children have with father figures, and went on to explain that those who have had poor experiences of their fathers often find it difficult to entrust themselves to God the Father.²

On January 28, 2015, Pope Francis gave a Wednesday General Audience on “father” as part of his catecheses on the family. He began by saying, “Today we shall take the word ‘father’ as our guide. It is a term dearer than any other to us Christians because it is the name by which Jesus taught us to call God: father.”³ Nevertheless, Pope Francis also drew attention to current difficulties in discussing fathers. He continued his audience with the following, “Today, however, one has reached the point of claiming that

¹ Benedict XVI, “General Audience I believe in God the almighty Father,” Vatican Website, January 30, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20130130.html (accessed September 4, 2015).

² Ibid.

³ Francis. “General Audience on the Family 3. The Father (First Part),” Vatican Website, January 28, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150128_udienza-generale.html (accessed September 4, 2015).

our society is a ‘society without fathers’. In other words, particularly in Western culture, the father figure would be symbolically absent, faded, removed.”⁴

Within three years, two Holy Fathers acknowledged that the state of human fatherhood in our current time is problematic for understanding the fundamental Christian truth that God is father, yet the reality of God as Father should define the identity of every baptized Christian. Jesus constantly taught throughout his public ministry that we are children of God. Indeed, a central message of the Gospel is that in and through Jesus, we have access to the Father and share in Jesus’ own divine sonship. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the liturgy of the Sacrament of Baptism, the Church teaches that a person reborn in baptism is made an adopted child of God.⁵

Baptism is the beginning of the journey to God, as his child, throughout one’s life. This reality is central to our faith and should be a cause for joyful evangelization. Instead, the awareness of what it means to be an adopted child of God—intimate relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ and a share in his inheritance—is lacking in many Christians. Many people in today’s modern culture have no experience of fatherhood with which to understand the fatherhood of God or their divine sonship.

In 2012, the U.S. Census bureau reported 1 in 3 children live in a fatherless home.⁶ In 2015, the CDC reported that 41% of children born in 2013 were born to unwed mothers.⁷ Looking at the numbers alone, these statistics are alarming, but they should be

⁴ Francis. “General Audience on the Family 3. The Father (First Part).”

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York, New York: Doubleday, a Division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1994), 1265, 2782.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, “2010 Census of Population and Housing.” (September 2012) as cited in “Effects of Fatherlessness on Children’s Development”, *Marriage and Religious Institute*. <http://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF14K18.pdf>. (accessed April 30, 2015).

⁷ Martin JA, Hamilton BE, Osterman MJK, et al. *Births: Final data for 2013. National vital statistics reports*; vol 64 no 1. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2015. As cited by the Centers

increasingly so because they reflect changing attitudes towards the role of fathers in the lives of their children. The recent Gallup poll for approval of out-of-wedlock births revealed that 61% of Catholics approve of the practice, almost equal with the U.S. average at 60%.⁸ Many children are growing up without their fathers, not to mention those children whose fathers may be physically present but emotionally unavailable for whatever reason. Tragically, much of American society approves, is indifferent, or is resigned to this trend and this includes Catholics.

While it is true that Christians will always need to evaluate their personal experience and purify themselves of any false images of God the Father, who “transcends the categories of the created world,” it cannot be denied that the diminishment of the fatherhood role which has occurred over the last 40 years and continues to take place in American society attacks also the fatherhood of God and the reality of divine sonship.⁹ In his recent apostolic exhortation to men in the Diocese of Phoenix, Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted wrote, “This is our enemy’s underlying plan: to remove our reliance on God the benevolent Father. To do this, Satan’s primary strategy is to damage and abolish human fatherhood, in the man and relationship where each of us first glimpses what God’s fatherhood might be like.”¹⁰ Human fatherhood should lead to God the Father. According

for Disease Control, <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/unmarried-childbearing.htm>, Page last updated September 30, 2015, (accessed February 1, 2016).

⁸ Jeffrey Jones, “Approval of Out-of-Wedlock Births Growing in U.S.” May 28, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/183428/approval-wedlock-births-growing.aspx>, (accessed on February 1, 2016).

⁹ CCC 2779

¹⁰ Thomas J. Olmsted, “Into the Breach: An Apostolic Exhortation to Catholic Men, my Spiritual Sons in the Diocese of Phoenix”, Into the Breach website, September 29, 2015, <http://www.intothebreach.net/into-the-breach/> (accessed October 10, 2015), 19.

to theological and sociological sources, fathers teach their children to journey beyond the comfortable sphere of life in search of the transcendent, including the journey to God.¹¹

In this current time, Christians need to be reminded about the teaching of divine filiation; that through Christ—who reveals the face of the Father—God the Father is truly *our father*, giving us what is necessary to guide us to a future full of hope.¹² Emphasizing this gospel truth with the ardor of the apostles serves as a challenge to the current culture of fatherlessness, reminding men that human fatherhood takes its origin from the fatherhood of God and serves as the human context for understanding what fatherhood is. Human fatherhood lived in imitation of Jesus Christ, who through his life exemplified “what father really means”, will at the same time teach people what it means to live as sons and daughters.¹³

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Jesus’ revelation of God’s Fatherhood and our divine sonship through Jesus, and to address the challenge that the current culture of fatherlessness poses for faith in, and the practical living of, this reality. The first chapter of this thesis focuses on Jesus’ revelation of the Fatherhood of God and our relationship with the Father as his children in the Gospels. The second chapter of this thesis will examine recent theological writings on fatherhood (that of God and man) and sociological evidence on the impact of father absence and father involvement to determine the importance of the fatherhood role. The third chapter will focus on the doctrine of divine filiation as explained the New Testament and the tradition of the

¹¹ Jose Granados, “Radiating Fatherhood”, *Columbia*, June 2010, 14-17. Robbie Low, “The Truth about Men and Church”, *Touchstone*, June 2003, <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-05-024-v> (Accessed May 4, 2015).

¹² Jeremiah 29:11

¹³ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 136.

Church, taking into account the influence of fatherhood on identity and mature Christian living. The fourth chapter of this thesis will apply the importance of divine filiation to the new evangelization both as a central message of the Gospel and as a challenge to the culture of fatherlessness.

Chapter I. Jesus Reveals the Father and our Identity as God's Children

Central to the Gospel is the truth that Jesus is the Son of God who reveals the Father, and through his incarnation enables man to share in God's life. Indeed, this message cannot be separated from understanding who Jesus is. Benedict XVI notes this in the Introduction to *Jesus of Nazareth*,

The Christological dimension—in other words, the mystery of the Son as the revealer of the Father—is present in everything Jesus says and does. Another important point appears here: We have said that in Jesus' filial communion with the Father, his human soul is also taken up into the act of praying. He who sees Jesus sees the Father (cf. Jn 14:9). The disciple who walks with Jesus is thus caught up with him into communion with God. And that is what redemption means: this stepping beyond the limits of human nature, which had been there as a possibility and an expectation in man, God's image and likeness, since the moment of creation.¹⁴

Not only does Jesus reveal the Father to man, but Jesus' disciples—those who keep his word—are brought into relationship with God by following the Son and their relationship to God is that of sons. While the Gospels are filled with Jesus' references to the Father, this section will look specifically at the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, The Parable of the Prodigal Son in the Gospel of Luke, and the Last Supper Discourse, specifically chapter 14:1-10, to discover a true image of God the Father, as taught by Jesus. This is important for understanding that through divine sonship, baptized Christians truly have God as Father, and to establish how God's fatherhood is experienced. In revealing God's fatherhood, Jesus speaks of qualities specific to the

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 7-8.

divinity of God the Father but also uses the language and experiences of human fatherhood.¹⁵

Jesus reveals the Father in the Sermon on the Mount

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasizes the relationship between God the Father and the disciples. His authoritative teaching on interior and exterior observance of the law conforms to the identity of his disciples as sons of God. Speaking of God as their heavenly father, Jesus emphasizes that God desires intimacy with each one of them. He first refers to God as their heavenly father in his exhortation that they let their light shine before others for the glory of God (Mt 5:16). His consistent reason for teaching the disciples to act in a specific way is to imitate their heavenly father, “But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.” (Mt. 5:44-45). The Sermon on the Mount is teaching the disciples how to live in the kingdom of God as children of God.¹⁶

Referring to God as “Father” is not particular to the New Testament, but Jesus emphasizes that reality with language that only minimally appears in the Old Testament. The Old Testament period was the time of covenant between God and his people whom he called his sons and firstborn (Ex 4:22-23; Dt 32:19; Is 1:2), and that covenant did not

¹⁵ In discussing this emphasis of Jesus’ teaching on God’s fatherhood, we do well to remember that Jesus himself had the personal experience of human fatherhood. Quoting a radio address of Pius XII, John Paul II wrote in *Redemptoris Custos*, “...we must recognize that Joseph showed Jesus ‘by a special gift of heaven, all the natural love, all the affectionate solicitude that a father’s heart can know.’” John Paul II, *On the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph in the Life of Christ and the Church-Redemptoris Custos*, Vatican Website, August 15, 1989, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_15081989_redemptoris-custos.html, 8.

¹⁶ George Martin, *Bringing the Gospel of Matthew to Life* (Ijamsville, Maryland: The Word Among Us Press, 2008), 98.

dissolve with the coming of Jesus Christ.¹⁷ In his book, *Evangelizing Catholics*, Scott Hahn brings together the Old Testament Covenant between God and the Israelites with Jesus' teaching of divine sonship. Speaking of the ancient Jewish people, he writes,

They were God's family, his children by adoption, their relationship forged long before Christ's coming through a sacred bond of kinship known as a covenant.

With the coming of Christ, God's covenant with Israel wasn't abolished. It was fulfilled. How?

Well, as he preached, Jesus again and again relied on familial language—father, son, brother, sister, firstborn, inheritance—to convey the truth about the Kingdom of God....

In the Sermon on the Mount alone, Jesus refers to God as "Father" seventeen times, a term used only eleven times in the entirety of the Hebrew canon. Jesus' use of kinship language functionally replaces covenant language, which practically disappears in the New Testament. The word "covenant" appears only once in Matthew and Mark, twice in Luke, and not at all in John. Why? Because the reality to which the covenant points—divine sonship—is precisely what the Incarnation achieves.¹⁸

The law was given to Israel to observe as their part of keeping the covenant which God had established with them. Now as Jesus announces the coming of God's Kingdom he enjoins them to observe the law as children honoring their father.

After instructions on alms and prayers, Jesus teaches the disciples how to pray, addressing God as father. Although this was not the first time in Scripture that prayer was made to God as Father, this way of addressing God was not the typical practice of Jews in the time of Jesus.¹⁹ Now Jesus instructs them to call on God as Father. Further on, he exhorts the disciples to trust in their Father's loving providence for them, reminding them that God's loving care is greater even than a human father for his child (Mt. 6:30; 7:11).

¹⁷ Gerald O' Collins, S.J., *The Tripersonal God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 14.

¹⁸ Scott Hahn, *Evangelizing Catholics A Mission Manual for the New Evangelization* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2014), 66-67.

¹⁹ Martin, 107. Martin identifies four places in the Old Testament where God is spoken of or addressed as Father (Tobit 13:4; Wisdom 2:16; Sirach 23:1, 51:10).

Throughout the Sermon, while Jesus gives instruction for human living, he also shows the disciples the true image of God the Father-loving, merciful, provident, intimate, and personal. In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict XVI explains the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount as instruction for human living that is inseparable from intimate relationship with God,

The Sermon on the Mount, as we have seen, draws a comprehensive portrait of the right way to live. It aims to show us how to be a human being. We could sum up its fundamental insights by saying that man can be understood only in light of God, and that his life is made righteous only when he lives it in relation to God. But God is not some distant stranger. He shows us his face in Jesus. In what Jesus does and wills, we come to know the mind and will of God himself.²⁰

It is important to note that Jesus desires to give us the true image of the father to counteract the image of God that man had created for himself as a result of the Fall (Genesis 3:1-13). In the sin of Adam and Eve was a rejection of God as Father.²¹ The result of that sin is the servile fear of God that humanity has continuously rebelled against throughout history in his desire for freedom. John Paul II describes this situation in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*,

*The father-son paradigm is ageless. It is older than human history....This notwithstanding, as we know from Revelation, in human history the "rays of fatherhood" meet a first resistance in the obscure but real fact of original sin. This is truly the key for interpreting reality. Original sin is not only the violation of a positive command of God but also, and above all, a violation of the will of God as expressed in that command. Original sin attempts, then to abolish fatherhood, destroying its rays which permeate the created world, placing in doubt the truth about God who is Love and leaving man only with a sense of the master-slave relationship.*²²

²⁰ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 128.

²¹ Thomas J. Olmsted, "Into the Breach," 19.

²² John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 227-228. Italics in original.

In his incarnation, Jesus desires to bring us back to the truth that God is Father, which is evidenced in his continuous mention of God's actions as father throughout the Sermon on the Mount.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15: 11-32), Jesus communicates the extraordinary depth of love on the part of a father toward his wayward son, to probe the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees who are judging him on account of his association with tax collectors and sinners. What emerges from this parable is a loving, tender, and merciful image of God the Father exemplified in the words and actions of Jesus Christ. John Paul II considers the father in the parable to be an analogy for God the Father which reveals the quality of his fatherhood. He states, "There is no doubt that in this simple but penetrating analogy the figure of the father reveals to us God as Father....The father of the prodigal son is faithful to his fatherhood, faithful to the love that he had always lavished on his son."²³ The father is "faithful to his fatherhood"; what does this mean? He is faithful to the love he has for his son which makes him a father. John Paul II writes,

The father's fidelity to himself is totally concentrated upon the humanity of the lost son, upon his dignity. This explains above all his joyous emotion at the moment of the son's return home. Going on, one can therefore say that the love for the son, the love that springs from the very essence of fatherhood, in a way obliges the father to be concerned about his son's dignity.²⁴

²³ John Paul II, *On the Mercy of God-Dives et Misericordia*, Vatican website, November 30, 1980, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia.html (accessed September 9, 2015), 6.

²⁴ Ibid.

God's concern for the dignity of his children is a dynamic aspect of his love for them. For this reason, in response to his children's recognition of their own dignity, he, like the father of the prodigal son, is filled with joyful affection.

Before leaving this parable, it is important to discuss the idea of freedom contained therein. The prodigal son wrongly assumed he would have greater freedom away from his father and instead lost his dignity, but in his moment of crisis, he chose well in returning to his father. Although it is a parable, we can deduce that before his son ever wandered away, the father had provided the son with a particular identity that his son was able to rediscover, which influenced his choice to return to his father. As exemplified in the parable, God does not limit the freedom of his children, but he, nevertheless, guides and provides them with values that assist them in life choices. He also remains vigilant for them and rejoices when they use their freedom well. This characteristic of the father, provider of identity and freedom, will connect to the fatherhood of all men in chapter two.

Last Supper Discourse, John 14:1-10

In the Sermon on the Mount and the Parable of the Prodigal Son, we receive images of God's fatherhood from Jesus' descriptions and analogies. In the Last Supper Discourse, Jesus once again reveals for us, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, "what *father* really means," but this time in reference to his own relationship with the Father.²⁵

The Last Supper Discourse includes John 13:1-17:26, but I will focus on John 14:1-10.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And

²⁵ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 136.

if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where (I) am going you know the way." Thomas said to him, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works.

Chapter 14 begins with Jesus' exhortation to the disciples to have faith in him as they have faith in the Father. Jesus' way to the Father and revelation of the Father will culminate in his death on the cross, which the disciples are struggling to accept, but faith in Jesus is necessary for the disciples to attain what they desire, union with the Father.²⁶ In the context of this exhortation, Philip tells Jesus to show them the Father, and in response to this statement Jesus asserts that he is the image of the Father, "Whoever has seen me has seen the father..." In this assertion, Jesus summarizes the work he has done up to this point of revealing God the Father and reiterates his oneness with the Father. Francis Moloney explains this in commentary on John 14:7-11,

Jesus' response looks back across the long period of time spent with the disciples (*meth' hymon*). To know Jesus is to know the Father...The problem lies in the disciples' lack of faith. They have heard and been taught the way to the Father (v.6): Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Jesus (cf. 10:38), but they have not come to believe in this oneness (v. 10a)... Flowing from this oneness and making it known are the works Jesus does.²⁷

Jesus' claim of oneness with the Father is expressed in his desire to accomplish the Father's will through his works, which includes his Passion and Death, the ultimate

²⁶ Moloney S.D.B., Francis J, *The Gospel of John* vol. 4 of *Sacra Pagina*, ed. by Daniel J. Harrington. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1998), 395.

²⁷ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 396.

revelation of the Father's love. It will be the mission of the disciples to continue making the Father known by their imitation of Jesus who is one with the Father.

Indeed, reading this passage invites us to reflect on what Jesus reveals about his own relationship with the Father, and criteria for living as adopted children of God. Fr. Thomas McGovern makes these claims in his article, "John Paul II on the Millennium and God as Father", saying,

On several different occasions Christ claimed an identity of nature with his Father, while affirming a filial relationship with him. We learn how to live the life of adopted children of God by following the example of his natural Son, Christ, who invited us to follow him closely, because he is 'the way, the truth and the life' (Jn 14:6). We need to reflect on the relationship he had with the Father in order to throw light on how we are to behave as children of God. To follow Christ closely, to become identified with him, is the way to intimacy with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The more Christ-like we are, the more we will become part of God's household (cf. Eph 2:19) and acquire the spiritual physiognomy of the children of God.²⁸

According to biblical testimony, we know that following the death and resurrection of Jesus, the disciples, by the power of the Holy Spirit, made God known through their teaching and testimony, thus fulfilling their mission, the mission of divine sons.

Reflecting on our divine sonship in Christ and what it means for our identity and behavior will be the task of Chapter three.

What we know about God the Father and why it matters

The Sermon on the Mount shows us that the Father provides for all our needs, desires to give us good things, and listens to our prayers with fatherly intimacy. The Parable of the Prodigal Son shows us that God is "rich in mercy" and restores us to our

²⁸ Fr. Thomas McGovern, "John Paul II on the Millennium and God the Father," *Homiletic & Pastoral Review*, April 1999, pp 8-17.

lost dignity after we have fallen from grace. The Last Supper Discourse shows us that Jesus is the image of the Father and that he is the way to the Father. It cannot escape notice however that in each of these Scriptures, as Scott Hahn says, Jesus uses familial language and analogies of father-son relationships; the father and child relationship, therefore, teaches either a positive or negative image of a relationship with God the Father. A true understanding of what “father” really means in regard to human fatherhood cannot be underestimated since God names human fathers after himself. The next chapter will examine the connection between human fatherhood and the fatherhood of God.

Chapter II. The Importance of Fatherhood

Contrasting fatherhood in Jesus’ time with fatherhood in modern times

In chapter one, we focused on the importance of knowing God the Father as he really is through Jesus’ revelation of the Father. In describing God the Father, Jesus explained God’s relationship with his children in human terms of fathers and children. He used the language and experience of the culture to communicate the spiritual reality of God’s fatherhood.

It is important to take into account that Jesus was speaking to people living in a patriarchal society in which fathers had great authority and influenced every aspect of their children’s lives. The role of fathers was clearly defined and understood.²⁹ This is not

²⁹ W.A. Visser’t Hooft, *The Fatherhood of God in an Age of Emancipation* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1982), 5. Hooft compares the role of the father in Ancient Israel and Rome; this would be the cultural context around Jesus’ time. He says, “In both, the family was the basic unit of society, dominated by the father, under the paternal roof. The father’s role was monarchical, and the principal duty of the children was to honour and obey him. In Israel, the father was also the judge and priest of the household, holding social and religious sway over his wife or wives, his children and his slaves. His power was absolute, and he could, if he so desired, sell his daughter into slavery. In Rome, the father had many of the same prerogatives and his *patria potestas* had the unique feature that it continued to operate as long as he lived. In other words, his son could not become a *persona sui juris*, a free person under the law, until his father died, or decided to emancipate him.

the case, however, for the modern Western world in which society questions the importance of men as fathers, and traditional authority is an object of distrust. Hence, what was an astonishing claim and cause for meditation (1 Jn. 3:1) during the first centuries of Christianity, that God is our father, is possibly becoming devoid of meaning for many people today.

Writing in 1982, W.A. Visser't Hooft, a Dutch theologian, observing the cultural shift away from patriarchal societies, asked questions about what effect it would have on people's responses to the Gospel revelation of God as Father. He states,

Yet the witness of the church is a message about Jesus Christ as the Son of God the Father. It is at the same time a message about the nature of God's fatherly love for his people. We cannot eliminate fatherhood from the Gospel without destroying its very meaning. On the other hand, could children, growing up in a society in which fathers were less and less respected and played a decreasingly important role, be expected to respond to such a message? Would they not perforce come to the conclusion that this message was an anachronism which belonged to the past, with the father role of authoritarian rulers or autocratic heads of families?³⁰

Looking at the current cultural situation, Hooft's ponderings have great warrant.

Fatherhood concerns the relationship between men and their offspring that requires loving and responsible use of authority on the part of the father, trust and respect on the part of the child. Though the Christian family model does not imitate all aspects of the family model from Jesus' time, it does recognize a differentiation of roles within the family based on the complementarity of men and women. This reality, however, has been displaced from contemporary culture, as society increasingly approves the removal of fathers from the family picture, trying to ignore the obvious consequences. At the same

³⁰ W.A. Visser't Hooft, *The Fatherhood of God in an Age of Emancipation*, 1. Looking at the "cultural history of the Western world", Hooft points out that post-patriarchal society has put the Christian Church in an "entirely new situation".

time, the culture continues to disconnect from the truth Jesus Christ came to bring: God who is father has chosen us as his own children to live in truth, freedom, and love, and to journey in this life to the reward of eternity with him.

Yet Jesus' message can still resonate today. The effects of fatherlessness and the "father hunger" that so many people experience indicate that fatherhood, both human and divine, is vital for society.³¹ This situation places the Church in a new position when she teaches about God the Father and divine sonship, because now teaching about these doctrines is not only education about grace and sacramental life, but is also confirmation that fatherhood matters. Understanding fatherhood, furthermore, is necessary for understanding how to live divine sonship. Jesus the Son is inseparable from God the Father. This second chapter will first define the culture of fatherlessness, detail its effects, and then address the question: what is the connection between understanding divine fatherhood and human fatherhood and how does the latter help people to live as children of God the Father? To do this, I will make use of sociological evidence on the impact of fathers on children and compare it with theological perspectives of human fatherhood in order to understand how human fatherhood both depends on and reflects God's fatherhood.

What is a Culture of Fatherlessness?

In our current time, the term "father" has come to connote a figure that is difficult to define.³² The importance of fathers, moreover, is being questioned by society, with

³¹ The experience of a child who has an absent father yet yearns for his presence is described by some psychologists as "fatherneed" or "father hunger".

³² David Blankenhorn points this out in his book, *Fatherless America*, by citing, among other sources, the following article: Carol Lawson, "'Who is My Daddy?' Can Be answered in Different Ways," *New York Times*, August 5, 1993, C-1.

some even asserting that fathers are unnecessary in the lives of children.³³ A culture that does not lament the loss of fathers and even attacks the important role and contribution of men as fathers is a culture of fatherlessness. David Blankenhorn speaks of this reality in his book, *Fatherless America*, when he defines “decultured paternity,” saying

...fatherhood has been diminished as paternity has become *decultured*—denuded of any authoritative social content or definition. A decultured paternity is a minimalist paternity. It is biology without society. As an extreme example, consider the phenomenon of the sperm bank: fatherhood as anonymous insemination. No definition of fatherhood could be tinier.³⁴

As pointed out by Blankenhorn, the cultural role that fatherhood once played has increasingly diminished as society at large minimizes the impact fathers have on the lives of children. Several beliefs or ideologies contribute to the culture of fatherlessness such as feminism, gender ideology, sitcom portrayals, and the welfare state, all of which fight against patriarchal norms.³⁵ Results of such beliefs (which also serve as perpetuating factors) include divorce, out-of-wedlock births, sperm banks, reproductive technologies, and lesbian adoption. Although, not all former patriarchal norms are desirable, these

³³ Pamela Paul, “Are Fathers Necessary? A paternal contribution may not be as essential as we think.” *The Atlantic* July/August 2010, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/07/are-fathers-necessary/308136/>, (Accessed February 8, 2016). Sociologists Timothy J. Biblarz and Judith Stacey claim that, “The gender of parents correlates in novel ways with parent-child relationships but has minor significance for children's psychological adjustment and social success.” Their article called “How Does the Gender of Parents Matter?” was published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* Vol. 72 February 2010, 3-22.

³⁴ David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York, New York: BasicBooks, a Division of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.), 1995, 16. I acknowledge that as of 2012, David Blankenhorn is a supporter of gay marriage, however, his book *Fatherless America* is important in the service of this topic.

³⁵ Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I will not discuss those factors in more depth, but I recommend the following sources: Robert A. Sirico, Congress on the Paternity of God and Paternity in Family, Pontificium Consilium Pro Familia, Vatican, June 3-5, 1999. Patrick Fagan and Aaron Churchill, “The Effects of Divorce on Children,” *Marriage and Religion Research Institute*, January 11, 2012, <http://www.frc.org/EF/EF12A22.pdf>. (Accessed April 30, 2015). Kay Hymowitz, “A growing culture of fatherlessness,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/la-oe-hymowitz16apr16-story.html>, (Accessed February 11, 2016). David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem*, (New York, New York: BasicBooks, a Division of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1995).

social ideas and constructions attack all authority that has traditionally been associated with men and fathers.

The attack on fatherhood is not relegated to human fathers but also affects theology. The fight against patriarchy includes battles issued by some feminist theologians for gender neutral language in prayers to God. The very name “father”, so essential for understanding God’s revelation of himself, has become oppressive. In 1999, following its conference on “The Paternity of God and Paternity in the Family”, the Pontifical Council for the Family spoke about this unprecedented attack on fatherhood in its report,

Sadly, fatherhood, both human and divine, is now under constant attack. Indeed, so closely are the two linked that an attack on one will always result in an attack on the other. These attacks have multiplied in the last thirty years, causing a crisis in faith and in family life.³⁶

One way the crisis has taken form in the current culture of “decultured paternity” is the ease with which men can walk away from taking responsibility for their offspring and detach fatherhood from manhood. Another is the lack of encouragement men have to go beyond minimal contributions to family or to make important and sacrificial decisions. For example, the structure of abortion laws robs men of the right to make a decision in favor of life for their unborn child or provides men with a “solution” for an unwanted pregnancy. Tragically, “today the principal cause of fatherlessness is paternal choice.”³⁷

Patrick Fagan of the Family Research Council found that as of 2009, only 44% of children reach age 17 in an intact family.³⁸ In 2012, according to the U.S. Census Bureau,

³⁶ Louise Kirk, “Report following the Pontifical Council for the Family’s Congress on ‘The Paternity of God and Paternity in the Family’” June 3-5, 1999, 1.

³⁷ David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 22.

³⁸ Patrick Fagan and Aaron Churchill, “The Effects of Divorce on Children,” *Marriage and Religion Research Institute*, January 11, 2012, <http://www.frc.org/EF/EF12A22.pdf>. (Accessed April 30, 2015), 2,

1 in 3 children in the United States lived in a fatherless home.³⁹ Currently, 41% of children are born into unmarried homes.⁴⁰ Of all non-residential parents, 90% are fathers.⁴¹

Referring to such statistics, Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted recently lamented the current situation of fatherlessness in our country saying,

These children are not fatherless because of some sweeping physical conflict, like World War II, which caused many wounds of fatherlessness, but rather because, far worse, fathers' own willed absence is happening on a massive scale. It is not hard to see how men's fears of fatherhood find a legion of support in today's culture of self, encouraging men to flee from this beautiful gift in pursuit of their own desires. The child is forced to ask the question: 'Where is my Daddy?' What then is the impact on a child's heart, on his or her understanding of the world, of love, and of the Heavenly Father, when the answer to these questions is 'He left us,' or 'I don't know,' or "From the sperm bank, and he left no contact address"?⁴²

The impact on the child's understanding of the world, love and of the Heavenly Father is great since fathers make important contributions to the way a child responds to the world, relationships, and God.⁴³

Regardless of claims to the contrary, evidence shows that father absence is significantly detrimental for children in all areas of their lives: physical, cognitive, social, and emotional. Children who do not live with their father are more likely to experience behavior problems at school.⁴⁴ They are, on average, more likely to choose deviant peers,

citing Patrick F. Fagan and Nicolas Zill, "The Second Annual Index of Family Belonging and Rejection," (Washington, D.C.: Marriage and Religion Research Institute, 17 November 2011).

³⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. "2010 Census of Population and Housing." (September 2012. Available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/doc/sf1.pdf>)

⁴⁰ Olmsted, Thomas J. "Into the Breach," 19.

⁴¹ Patrick Fagan, "The Effects of Divorce on Children," 5.

⁴² Olmsted, Thomas J. "Into the Breach," 20.

⁴³ See John W. Miller, *Calling God "Father"* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999) and George Gilder, *Men and Marriage* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., 1986) for more on this point.

⁴⁴ Sarah Allen and Kerry Daly, "The Effects of Father Involvement: An Updated Research Summary of the Evidence," *Father Involvement Research Alliance* (2007): 8.

have trouble getting along with other children, be at higher risk for peer problems, and be more aggressive.⁴⁵ Boys and girls who live without their fathers are less likely to be able to delay gratification, have poor impulse control over their anger and sexual gratification, and have a weaker sense of right and wrong.⁴⁶ Adolescents who live without their father are more likely to engage in greater and earlier sexual activity, are more likely to become pregnant as a teenager and are more likely to have a child outside of marriage.⁴⁷

Many people may find it surprising that fathers also have a great impact on the spiritual lives of children. Over 60% of children whose fathers do not attend church will not attend church as adults.⁴⁸ After a divorce, which often separates children from daily contact with their father, children are more likely to abandon their faith.⁴⁹

Although it should be obvious that fatherlessness will negatively impact children, what is not so obvious is the reason why. It is true that two parents are in most cases better than one, but some people would now argue that it does not matter whether those two parents are a mother (woman) and a father (man). Both theology and sociology prove otherwise.

Sociological and Psychological Perspective on Father Impact

Countless studies have been done that show father involvement has significantly positive effects in all areas of a child's life. To go through even some of the effects would exhaust the length of this thesis; I will focus, therefore, on one finding that has

⁴⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 11. There is a strong correlation between father absence and early sexual activity among adolescent girls.

⁴⁸ Robbie Low, "The Truth About Men & Church," *Touchstone*, June 2003, 24.

⁴⁹ Patrick Fagan, "The Effects of Divorce on Children," 26.

implications for both a child's natural and supernatural life. Fathers help their children to meet the world beginning from the time they are born. They do so through their interaction, involvement, and support.

Infants with involved fathers are found to be more exploratory and curious of the world around them.⁵⁰ Evidence shows that fathers play more with their infants than mothers do, often times initiating creative or rough and tumble kind of play with no need for toys.⁵¹ Although, fathers tend to be less predictable for the child, the child looks forward to dad's unpredictability, understanding that he or she is safe with their father. In his book, *Do Fathers Matter? What Science is Telling Us about the Parent We've Overlooked*, Paul Raeburn cites Paquette of the University of Montreal who explains why destabilizing play may have the critical function of teaching children how to deal with unexpected events, "Children's need to be 'stimulated, pushed and encouraged to take risks is as great as their need for stability and security.'"⁵² Children who are guided and encouraged to take risks learn to be creative as they move out into the world. Fathers also help children tolerate frustration when learning new things, withholding aid but encouraging the child verbally and by physical presence.⁵³ Children with involved fathers show greater confidence and willingness to try new things in a school setting.⁵⁴ They are

⁵⁰ Kyle Pruett, *Fatherhood: Why Father Care is as Essential as Mother Care for Your Child* (New York: Broadway Books, 2000), 41.

⁵¹ Kyle Pruett, *Fatherhood*, 27-28. "Creative" refers to play that does not depend on traditional games or themes.

⁵² Daniel Paquette, "Theorizing the Father-Child Relationship: Mechanisms and Developmental Outcomes," *Human Development* 47, no.4 (2004): 205. Quoted in Paul Raeburn, *Do Fathers Matter? What Science Is Telling Us About the Parent We've Overlooked* (New York: Scientific American/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), 149.

⁵³ Pruett, *Fatherhood*, 30-31. Mothers often take a different approach, helping the child with the content.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

often more popular among their peers.⁵⁵ Paquette came to the conclusion that “fathers may be especially important in supporting their children as they move from the family to the world outside the door.”⁵⁶ Kyle Pruett reaches a similar conclusion in his book, *Fatherneed*,

A dad begins to enhance his child’s maturation and autonomy by balancing the powerful pull toward the mother; ...Fathers promote children’s acceptance of the real-world by emotionally taking them to the mountain, teaching them to climb, showing them the world, and, over time, showing them the way through and around it. Even when men serve as primary caregivers, this role stays in their hands, and children seem to count on them to fulfill that emotional promise to get them, safe and whole, into the real world beyond their mother’s arms.⁵⁷

As children grow into adolescents, their father’s support and involvement positively influences their self-worth and their personal achievements as well as the way they view the opposite sex.⁵⁸ Fathers have considerable influence, through their involvement and personal example, over their teenager’s personal decisions about sexual activity, drug use, and academic pursuits. Especially noteworthy is the effect of a father’s moral integrity and paternal warmth on his child’s moral maturity as an adult.⁵⁹ These influences help the child to meet the challenges of the world with values and a sense of identity that can be observed as children mature into adults.

Theological Perspective on Father Impact

⁵⁵ Paul Raeburn, *Do Fathers Matter? What Science Is Telling Us About the Parent We’ve Overlooked*, 152. Kyle Pruett, *Fatherneed*, 91.

⁵⁶ Raeburn, *Do Fathers Matter?*, 149.

⁵⁷ Pruett, *Fatherneed*, 57.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 95. Father involvement is shown to be particularly beneficial for adolescent girls.

⁵⁹ Pruett, *Fatherneed*, 97. MARRI Research, “The Role of Father in the Family.” *Marriage and Religion Institute*. <http://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF15A88.pdf>. (Accessed on April 30, 2015). Fathers who regularly attend church have children who are less likely to cohabit as adults and are more likely to marry.

We've seen how a father helps his child meet the world from the sociological perspective, but how is this true of a father's influence on his child's spiritual life? Fittingly, the father helps the child do spiritually what he helps the child do academically, socially, and emotionally; he helps the child to seek God. Jose Granados writes, "The task and purpose of Christian fatherhood is to make room for God in the lives of one's children."⁶⁰ To understand this better, the very way that a child comes into existence is important for our discussion and will connect to how fathers help children to meet the world.

The child grows in the womb of his or her mother and therefore has an intimate connection with her from the beginning of life. The father's relationship with the child begins as one which is physically separate from the child and this fact communicates something about his role.⁶¹ Massimo Camisasca writes,

Why is fatherhood so important? What dynamic does it describe in the relationship between a man and things, between a man and other men?

If motherhood is the experience of generating and of being generated, of bringing life into the world gratuitously and, on the part of the child, of a place to which it can always return, a receptive foundation that continues to generate, fatherhood coincides with the experience of being introduced into the world. Fatherhood and motherhood cooperate with one another to constitute the personality of the child; in the child's soul, they generate two poles in permanent tension.⁶²

The child wants to go out into the world, and yet also wants to be safe in the arms of his mother, who surrounds him with love. The initial distance between the father and child puts the father in a position to help his child separate himself from the predictability of home, "to go out of himself," and to embrace his own creativity in contributing to the

⁶⁰ Jose Granados, "Radiating Fatherhood," *Columbia*, June 2010, 15.

⁶¹ Granados, "Radiating Fatherhood," 15.

⁶² Massimo Camisasca, "Fatherhood, The Source of Communion: Fatherhood as the Generation of Life, Freedom and Love," *Communio*, Fall 2010, 542.

world.⁶³ The father provides the space in which the child can grow and mature.⁶⁴ In this way, human fatherhood imitates how God the Father gives us the freedom to make a contribution in the world. God did this with Adam, introducing him to the world and allowing him to name the animals.⁶⁵ Later God sent Jesus, his own Son into the world, and Jesus passed on what he knew from his Father. Jesus exemplified the Father's care for our earthly life, and for our future destiny with him, in the miraculous healings he performed and in his teaching.

From the action of God the Father and Jesus in salvation history, we learn that part of the father's task lies in introducing his child not just to the world, but to the transcendent, to God who made the world. The father teaches the child the meaning of his or her life, which is the journey to God. Through the witness of his relationship with God, he shows his child how to walk toward God.⁶⁶

Having shared in the authorship of life, the father has to be both an authority and an educator. He is not an authority in the sense of Ancient Israel or Rome, exercising complete control over his wife and children, who have no freedom of their own. Rather, in the words of Donald DeMarco, he is "someone to learn from and be guided by. But his authority does not restrict the liberty of others. In fact, the purpose of fatherly authority is to cultivate and enhance liberty."⁶⁷ The father anticipates the future when his children will be responsible for their own decisions, so he teaches them the discipline and values that will guide them in the use of their freedom.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ibid., 543.

⁶⁴ Granados, "Radiating Fatherhood," 15.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁷ Donald DeMarco, "Restoring the fullness of fatherhood," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, December 2011, 22.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 22.

Consequently, fathers hold a special place in the family as educators, those who lead their children out of the home. Several spiritual fathers of the Church, including John Paul II and Pope Francis, emphasize that the father has the task of educating his children by his words and his witness. In *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II states,

In revealing and in reliving on earth the very fatherhood of God, a man is called upon to ensure the harmonious and united development of all the members of the family: he will perform this task by exercising generous responsibility for the life conceived under the heart of the mother, by a more solicitous commitment to education, a task he shares with his wife, by work which is never a cause of division in the family but promotes its unity and stability, and by means of the witness he gives of an adult Christian life which effectively introduces the children into the living experience of Christ and the Church.⁶⁹

John Paul II identifies the role of the father as one who is responsible for the education of his children and the initiator of their life in God. Pope Francis speaks of fathers as those who hand on a wise heart to their children,

Nothing could better express the pride and emotion a father feels when he understands that he has handed down to his child what really matters in life, that is, a wise heart. This father does not say: “I am proud of you because you are the same as me, because you repeat the things I say and do”. No, he does not say anything so simple to him. He says something much more important, which we can understand in this way: “I will be happy every time I see you act with wisdom, and I will be moved every time that I hear you speak with rectitude. This is what I wanted to leave to you, that this one thing become yours: the attitude to feel and act, to speak and judge with wisdom and rectitude. And that you might be like this, I taught you the things you didn’t know, I corrected the errors you didn’t see.... Now, continues the father, “I see that you strive to be this way with your own children, and with everyone, and it moves me. I am happy to be your father”. This is what a wise father, a mature father, says.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ John Paul II, *On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World-Familiaris Consortio*, Vatican Website, November 22, 1981. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html (accessed February 19, 2016), 25. This vision of man’s role in “the harmonious and united development of all the members of the family” harkens back to the traditional idea of the man and husband as the “head” of the family.

⁷⁰ Francis, “General Audience on the Family 4. The Father (Second Part)”. Vatican Website. February 4, 2015. Vatican Website. February 4, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150204_udienza-generale.html (accessed September 4, 2015).

By handing on their wisdom, fathers give their children the ability to give life in the future; this is exactly what God desires for them.

What happens then for a child without the presence of his or her father? What happens in a society in which the father is increasingly absent? Reflecting on that situation, Granados states,

When we understand the greatness of the father's mission, we also see the danger in our society's lack of fatherhood. When a father is absent, he leaves in his child's life a void. He is not present to heal the wound caused by the child's separation from the mother and cannot teach his child to face a future full of difficulties and uncertainties. He is not able to accomplish the mission of helping his child discover the importance of following God and seeking his face.⁷¹

Large numbers of children without fathers will lack the direction they need to make decisions in life and to make God their focus. Camisasca, further details the sad but familiar situation of the fatherless,

When the father is lacking, when his presence is weak or formalized, the children often have serious problems in their encounter with reality. Reality frightens them; they don't know how to encounter it, how to face it, they are wounded by every tiny contradiction. They want to run back to their perhaps idealized mothers, to a closed circle of short-term friendships, to dialogue with their computers or their cell phones (important relationships in which the "I" is never called into question), to refuge in drugs, to a complete rejection of oneself in the obsessive experience of a sexuality experienced as death, as the annihilation of the 'I.'

Today we are aware that the lack of a father figure makes the child insecure and lacking in vigor. Because the child was not spurred on toward life, it has a greater difficulty in expressing itself creatively. A young person without a father does not know how to take on responsibility in the face of everyday choices and regards reality as hostile, as a stage filled with challenges that cost too much psychic, spiritual, and affective energy.⁷²

⁷¹ Granados, "Radiating Fatherhood," 15-16.

⁷² Camisasca, "Fatherhood, The Source of Communion," 542.

Based on the statistical, sociological, and psychological evidence, Camisasca accurately describes the plight of those whose father is absent.

Both Granados and Camisasca indicate that without fathers, children do not learn how to contribute to the world. They do not know how to interact with the world or confront it. In a sense, there is a part of them that has never been formed or guided, and without this part of their identity, they respond to challenges and difficulties superficially. Without the witness of their father, who receives the gift of his fatherhood from God, they also do not perceive the loving presence and guidance of their heavenly father in the gift of their life. Thus without the presence of their father, the effects on children are damaging as seen in the statistics presented earlier. Without the experience of fatherhood, men and women are lacking in the experience of being sons and daughters.⁷³

Participating in the fatherhood of God

From both the theological and sociological perspective, the task of a human father is immense. How could it not be, however, when it is closely linked to divine fatherhood by name?⁷⁴ Scriptural revelation confirms that God has revealed himself as Father and all fathers receive their name from God, “I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named” (Eph. 3:14-15). Men have received a name that belongs first and foremost to God the Father. Fatherhood is therefore meant to imitate and participate in God’s fatherhood, a sublime and daunting task that demands

⁷³ Ibid., 539. This is not to say that mothers do not have an important role in the life of their sons and daughters, but their role is different than and cooperates with the role of the father.

⁷⁴ The fact that God the Father and human fathers share the same name is emphasized by the feminist theologians who claim that the term “father” projects human ideas onto God. See Matthew Lewis Sutton, “Retrieval of fatherhood through a Retrieval of Faith in God the Father,” *Proceedings of the Nineteenth University Faculty for Life Conference at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, Minneapolis MN (2009)*, Ed. Joseph W. Koterski, S.J. (Washington, D.C. University Faculty for Life, 2013), 191-203

maturity and courage. No man can take this task upon himself.⁷⁵ It is God who first generates and gives life. He has authority over heaven and earth. He teaches us his ways. Through God's providence we are secure and receive all that we need. Human fatherhood imitates God's fatherhood through generation (physical and or spiritual), exercising authority, teaching, protecting, and providing.⁷⁶ Human fathers, moreover, guide their children to seek God the Father, by fulfilling their role, which works in union with, but differs uniquely from that of the children's mother.

Appropriately, Camisasca states, "Fatherhood is at once a challenge and a risk."⁷⁷

The challenge and risk of fatherhood is being an authority without going to the extremes of authoritarianism or eliminating oneself as an authority.⁷⁸ The father with authority uses his authority to educate his children to go out of themselves.⁷⁹ He looks to the physical, social, and emotional wellbeing of his child but first and foremost to the spiritual. In order to do this, the father has to learn from a father.⁸⁰ While a man can learn from his own father, priests, teachers, coaches and other father figures, he will find the most perfect example in Jesus; "By means of his life, Jesus taught us that fatherhood is the imitation of God the Father."⁸¹ Jesus, who is always in union with his Father, became a father to the apostles in the sense that he educated them in how to come to God the Father. For these reasons, Jose Granados explains that fathers must find courage by looking to Christ, "Because the father's mission is a spiritual one, he needs to find in

⁷⁵ Camisasca, "Fatherhood, The Source of Communion," 547.

⁷⁶ Olmsted, "Into the Breach," 20. Francis, Homily, June 26, 2013. Camisasca, "Fatherhood, The Source of Communion," 544.

⁷⁷ Camisasca, "Fatherhood, The Source of Communion," 541.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 541-542.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 543.

⁸⁰ Camisasca, "Fatherhood, The Source of Communion," 543.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Christ the strength not to cast away fatherhood as a burden. Jesus Christ is God's answer to the crisis of fatherhood. Ultimately if we want to know what fatherhood is about, we need to go to him. Jesus lived totally from the Father's love and thus was able to make the Father present in our world."⁸² Jesus as perfect image of the father teaches that the father is available to us, that he listens to us. He also teaches us that God meets us in our needs and our questions. While he addresses our concerns, he also educates us about the essential in our lives. He does not solely issue commands but engages us in the pursuit of the good and the true, giving us a share in his mission.

By extension, in Jesus we see the perfect connection between fatherhood and divine sonship. Jesus receives the love of the Father, which includes the will of the Father, with loving trust. His life and actions are so guided by the Father, that by seeing him, we see the Father. Pope Francis' words about the father who passes on a wise heart to his son are an example of how the guidance of the father forms the child into one who reflects his father. Having established this connection, the next chapter will discuss divine sonship in greater depth.

⁸² Granados, "Radiating Fatherhood," 17.

Chapter III. Theology of divine filiation and its implications for our identity

There are three questions this paper has considered thus far: one, what did Jesus reveal about God's fatherhood? Two, how does the culture of fatherlessness affect both divine fatherhood and human fatherhood? Three, what does the impact of fatherhood on children teach about the relationship between fatherhood and sonship? It is important to establish answers to these questions in order to appreciate the gift of divine sonship and the responsibility it entails, and also to grasp the disconnect that people experience between hearing they are children of God and living *as* children of God. This section will proceed first by examining scriptural testimony of divine sonship in the Prologue to the Gospel of John, Paul's Letters to the Romans, Galatians and Ephesians, and the First Letter of John. Then, it will reflect on the gift of divine sonship received through baptism, and meeting the responsibilities of receiving the sacrament. Finally, it will evaluate the impact of fatherlessness on Christian living of divine sonship.

Prologue of the Gospel of John, 1:12-13

The Prologue of John's Gospel describes Jesus' preexistence and divinity, followed by his incarnation and the purpose for which he came into the world, one reason being the gift of divine filiation. In the second section of the Prologue, focused on the Incarnation of the Word, verses 12 and 13 say that faith in the Word provides human beings with the gift of divine sonship: "But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God."⁸³ The gift described is available in the present to those who receive the Word and believe in his name as Francis J. Moloney explains in his exegesis of these verses:

The Power given is not a promise but an achieved fact for those who receive and believe. A Johannine understanding of life and eternal life has been broached for the first time. One does not have to wait for an end-time to become a child of God...In a traditional eschatology the believer waits for resurrection and the end of time for the final gifts of life and eternal life. In the Fourth Gospel these gifts are anticipated. They are available to the believer *now*, and are thus "realized."⁸⁴

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus will consistently refer to his love for and union with the Father, a union that makes it possible for those who believe in the Son of God to share in his sonship. The fact that the gift of divine sonship appears in the Prologue places it among the major Christological doctrines that appear in the Prologue, which indicates its significance for Christian belief and life.⁸⁵

Pauline Epistles: Paul's focus on our adoption in Christ

⁸³ John 1:12-13 NAB

⁸⁴ Francis J. Moloney S.D.B., *The Gospel of John*, vol. 4 of *Sacra Pagina*. ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1998), 38.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 41. Moloney lists the major Christological beliefs contained in the Prologue: the Word preexisted creation with God; creation was through the Word; divine filiation is possible for believers; Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God, the Word become flesh; he shares in the divinity of God, yet he has taken on the human condition totally; Jesus is the unique, once-and-for-all revelation of God in the human story; the perfection of God's earlier gift of the Law to Moses takes place in and through Jesus Christ.

Divine Sonship in Galatians

In the Letter to the Galatians, Paul contrasts living under the Mosaic Law with living according to the graces won by Christ's redemption, which include divine adoption:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.⁸⁶

These verses assert that Christian believers have received adoption in Christ, which has changed their status from that of a slave to a son. Paul speaks of son in the sense of one who has come of age, not as a young child who would have been under a disciplinarian until the time set by his father.⁸⁷ The status of a son gave a person freedom that a slave (or small child) did not enjoy. The Spirit provides evidence of the change in their status by crying out in them, "Abba".⁸⁸ Using the familiar term that children used for their father in a Jewish family shows that believers share in the intimacy Christ expressed in prayers to his Father.⁸⁹

Divine Sonship in Romans

In Romans 8, Paul goes to great length in describing divine sonship, and repeats some of what he wrote to the Galatians.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption through which we cry, "Abba, Father!" The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Galatians 4:4-7 NAB.

⁸⁷ Galatians 3:24-25, 4:1-2.

⁸⁸ Brendan Byrne, S.J. *Galatians and Romans* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), 32.

⁸⁹ Byrne, *Galatians and Romans*, 32.

⁹⁰ Romans 8:14-17 NAB.

These verses from Romans 8 are part of Paul's explanation on the effects of justification (Romans 5-8). Immediately preceding these verses, Paul explains that the person who lives according to the flesh is hostile to God but the one who lives according to the Spirit has life. This passage is the affirmation of a reality confirmed by the Spirit of God, divine sonship. The use of "for", at the beginning of verse 14, shows that Paul's affirmation follows upon the logic he has explained in Romans 8:9-11 regarding the indwelling of the Spirit of God. The word, "children" in the NAB translates *huios*, "sons" and refers to those who are ruled by the Spirit of God and trust in God as their Father. They form their life and character to Christ, and partake of the divine nature.⁹¹ Prior to receiving the Spirit, they were in fear before God, but now they have been brought into intimate relationship with God empty of fear. The word "adoption" used in Romans 8:15 (and also Galatians 4:5), is translated from *huiiothesia*. It is a term used five times, exclusively by Paul, in the New Testament. This term carries the meaning of the Greco-Roman legal process whereby the adoptee became a son and full heir of his father, the same as any of the father's natural born children. Paul, however, also uses this term in connection with the Old Testament Covenant by which Israel was the chosen adopted child of God.⁹² Overall, Paul uses the term, *huiiothesia*, to attribute the sonship of believers to God's divine act.⁹³ In contrast to the natural sonship all people share by way of having God as

⁹¹ *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Blue Letter Bible, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G5207&t=RSV>, (accessed on November 16, 2015). 2 Peter 1:4.

⁹² Romans 9:4.

⁹³ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 1215.

Creator, adopted divine sonship is what believers in Christ have received from the Spirit, and is their true nature and identity.⁹⁴

Considering the sublimity of the claim to be children of God, the Holy Spirit is needed to confirm that divine sonship, and the inheritance that comes with it, is a reality. The dual witness of the Spirit with our spirit also protects Christian believers from losing their identity as sons and daughters of God when they face trials that threaten that reality. The word for “children” in verse 16 and 17, *tekna* or *teknon*, refers to a child in the sense of progeny or descendants.⁹⁵ Historically, this word denoted a close personal relationship. In Paul, the term is related to divine sonship through Christ’s work which brings with it freedom and adulthood.⁹⁶ Lastly, the Spirit gives strength to undergo suffering with Christ in order to receive the complete inheritance.

Paul’s description of divine sonship as intimacy with God the Father reaffirms what Christ taught about the fatherhood of God.⁹⁷ The relationship that adopted sons and daughters enjoy is so intimate that they, like Jesus, can cry out “*Abba* Father!” Although Romans 8:14-17 does not reference the Sermon on the Mount, calling God “*Abba* Father!” reiterates Jesus’ teaching about praying to God as “Our Father”. The words, “*Abba* Father!” also imitate Jesus’ own cry to his Father during his agony in the garden of Gethsemane (Mk. 14: 36). By using these words, the early Christian community living in Christ continued Jesus’ own way of addressing the Father.⁹⁸ The confirmation of having

⁹⁴ *Vine’s*, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G5206&t=RSV>, (accessed on November 16, 2015).

⁹⁵ Blue Letter Bible, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G5043&t=RSV>, (accessed November 16, 2015).

⁹⁶ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 762-763.

⁹⁷ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 653.

⁹⁸ Brendan Byrne, S.J., *Romans*, vol. 6 of *Sacra Pagina*, ed. Daniel Harrington, S.J. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 250.

been adopted as God's own children also confirms a promise Jesus made to his disciples in the Gospel of John, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (Jn. 14:18).

Jesus is present in those who believe in him through the Spirit and those, in whom Jesus is present, are loved by the Father (Jn. 14:21).⁹⁹ Adoption as children of God assures all disciples that they are never without God's loving presence and care, nor are they without his guidance as they live in the world. Secondly, Paul makes the assertion that the children of God are heirs with Christ. In the Gospel of Luke, Christ proclaims that God's followers should have no worries about their future welfare, "Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom."¹⁰⁰

Divine Sonship in Ephesians

Paul's letter to the Ephesians begins with a description of the Father's plan of salvation in the context of a blessing.¹⁰¹ Ephesians 1:3-6 detail the role of God the Father within the plan of salvation, including his choice to adopt faithful believers,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the beloved.¹⁰²

God the Father's plan includes his deliberate choice of believers to share in the life of his Son, that they would be holy and set apart for him. The reason that God chooses believers and adopts them is because of his love for them.¹⁰³ It is God's fatherly love that raises

⁹⁹ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 402.

¹⁰⁰ Luke 12:32

¹⁰¹ Peter Williamson, *Ephesians: Catholic Commentary on Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009), 28-30. Paul, here, uses the Jewish form of blessing, a *berakah*.

¹⁰² Ephesians 1:3-6 NAB.

¹⁰³ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 34.

them to a dignity they could never have imagined or been able to attain for themselves. In these verses, the focus on adoption, *huiiothesia*, refers not to the legal process, but to the result of adoption, being made sons and daughters of God, members of his family.¹⁰⁴

Once again, Paul proclaims that Christians have an intimate relationship with God the Father in Jesus Christ. Paul also declares that God has adopted us “in accord with the favor of his will”, meaning that God finds pleasure in making believers his own children.¹⁰⁵ Having been adopted as God’s own sons and daughters, believers can count on God’s protection, provision, and steadfast love.

The First Johannine Epistle

1 John 3:1-3 also speaks of believers as children of God:

See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure.

John’s use of the word “see” has the imperative meaning, “Look!” calling attention to a remarkable revelation.¹⁰⁶ In this case, the revelation refers to the gift of being called children of God.¹⁰⁷ First John 3 begins a discussion about God’s fatherly love for his children, shown in his adoption of them as sons and daughters.¹⁰⁸ Although the word “adoption” does not appear in the verse, being called children of God implies adoption.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 34.

¹⁰⁵ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 35.

¹⁰⁶ John Painter, *1, 2, 3, John* vol. 18 of *Sacra Pagina*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 217.

¹⁰⁷ Painter, *Sacra Pagina*, 217. The word for children, *tekna*, is a neuter noun that is non-gender specific in referring to people.

¹⁰⁸ Painter, *1, 2, 3, John*, 219.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Recall to mind that the adoption practices of Rome and Israel held that the adopted son was a full son and heir. Here John asserts that those who are called children of God are indeed children of God.¹¹⁰

John's reassurance in verse 2, "Beloved, we are God's children now," implies a need on the part of believers for reassurance.¹¹¹ It is possible that the claim of being children of God in the present was under attack by opponents of the faith or the world.¹¹² Another possibility is that some people did not believe that being called children of God actually meant that believers *were* children of God.¹¹³ John also did not want to negate that believers were indeed children of God in the present when he went on to assert that they would undergo further transformation in the future age to come.¹¹⁴

The criteria for being children of God is a life free from sin, focused on becoming conformed to Christ, the pure one. John further develops this in the verses that follow, 4-10, making distinctions between the children of God, who act righteously, and the children of the devil, who commit sin.

Implications of New Testament Writings on Divine Sonship

The frequency with which Christ and the Apostles spoke of believers as children of God the Father testifies to several realities. First, the doctrine of divine sonship has a solid place in Scriptural revelation and was a well-established belief in the early Church. Secondly, the gift of calling God Father and being called children of God was considered

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 220.

¹¹² Ibid., "World" as John uses it here refers to those who have rejected Jesus and live by worldly values, 191.

¹¹³ Ibid., 220.

¹¹⁴ Painter, *1, 2, 3, John*, 220-221.

a remarkable reality. Thirdly, the doctrine needed defending and explanation then, as it does now.

John's reassurance that believers are indeed children of God is needed in our present day. Those who are taught that they are children of God by virtue of their baptism often receive this as a saying of common knowledge and yet they lack an experience of the revelatory power of the claim. Often enough, there is little development in teaching Catholics what Christian life should look like because they are children of God. The culture of fatherlessness exacerbates the problem by questioning the necessity of a father at all, let alone what is expected in the relationship between a father and child. For these reasons, it is important to understand how baptism confers divine sonship and what a faithful response to God's fatherhood entails, along with the father's role in aiding his child to respond.

Baptism and Divine Adoption

Divine adoption occurs in the sacrament of Baptism. Baptism is the beginning of the Christian life. The baptismal rite contains the two-fold symbol of dying and rising with Christ; immersed in water, the person dies with Christ and rising out of the water, they share in his Resurrection.¹¹⁵ Through baptism, all sin, original and personal, is forgiven and removed, as well as the punishment due for sin. The person becomes a new creature, a child of God born in the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁶ Through sanctifying grace, the baptized receive the theological virtues, gifts of the Holy Spirit, and can grow in the moral virtues elevated by grace.¹¹⁷ Baptism effects divine adoption testified to in the

¹¹⁵ CCC, 1239. Baptism is also conferred validly by pouring water three times over the candidate's head.

¹¹⁶ CCC 1262-63.

¹¹⁷ CCC 1266, 1810.

Gospel of John, Galatians, Romans, Ephesians, and 1 John. Through the Sacrament of Baptism, believers become members of God's divine family and members of the Body of Christ, the Church.

Romans 8:14-17, which we examined above, is an expression of what occurs in the sacrament of Baptism through the power of the Holy Spirit. John Paul II explains the process of divine adoption saying,

For as St. Paul teaches, "all who are led by the Spirit of God" are "children of God." The filiation of divine adoption is born in man on the basis of the mystery of the Incarnation, therefore through Christ the eternal Son. But the birth, or rebirth, happens when God the Father "sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts." Then "we receive a spirit of adopted sons by which we cry "Abba, Father!" Hence the divine filiation planted in the human soul through sanctifying grace is the work of the Holy Spirit. "It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ." Sanctifying grace is the principle and source of man's new life: divine, supernatural life....Thus there is a supernatural "adoption," of which the source is the Holy Spirit, love and gift. As such he is given to man. And in the superabundance of the uncreated gift there begins in the heart of all human beings that particular gift whereby they "become partakers of the divine nature." Thus human life becomes permeated, through participation, by the divine, supernatural dimension. There is granted the new life, in which as a sharer in the mystery of the Incarnation "man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit."¹¹⁸

Through the reception of the Holy Spirit and sanctifying grace, one is made a new creature with a new identity. Adopted by God, one is no longer a slave to sin; the master-slave dynamic that humanity sensed between God and they after the Fall, in Genesis, is over. John Paul II referred to this Pauline text as one of "the essential truths of the Gospel teaching" which "leads us into the deepest mystery of the Christian vocation: in the divine plan we are called to become sons and daughters of God in Christ, through the

¹¹⁸ John Paul II, *On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World-Dominum et vivificantem*, Vatican website, May 18, 1986, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_18051986_dominum-et-vivificantem.html (accessed May 7, 2015), 52.

Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁹ Christians have to know that their calling in life takes root in the truth of divine filiation. Then the key to living as a son or daughter of God is allowing oneself to be led by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

Understanding the Reality of Divine Adoption

Both the Scriptures and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* communicate and affirm the reality of divine adoption, but devote limited space to explaining the theology of the reality. Matthias J. Scheeben, a German theologian of the 19th century, wrote more extensively on the topic in his book, *The Glories of Divine Grace*. In writing about sanctifying grace, he explains the change in the nature of a baptized person,

What we cannot claim by right, the infinite liberality of God gives us in grace. Although we are not by nature children of God, we become such through grace, and so true is this that as adopted children, we are put on a par with the natural Son of God. We become by grace what He is by nature. What He has in Himself, that we obtain through participation in His nature.¹²⁰

As recipients of sanctifying grace, the baptized have the life of God within them, life won for them by Christ’s death and Resurrection. They, furthermore, share in God’s divine nature, which they did not share prior to baptism, thus it can be said that at baptism, the person is born of God.

Those born of God in baptism also share the image of God’s only Son, sharing in his truth, beauty, and goodness.

Divine grace consists not merely in the fact that God directs His affection to us, but above all in this, that He gives us a supernatural beauty and goodness, so that we consider His favor as the fruit of this and remain

¹¹⁹ John Paul II, *Message to Youth*, Vatican website, August 15, 1990, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/youth/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_15081990_vi-world-youth-day.html (accessed January 8, 2016), 1.

¹²⁰ Matthias J. Scheeben, *The Glories of Divine Grace* (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 2000), 96.

worthy of it. Likewise, we must say that God loves us not only as His children, in His Son and through His Son, but that He impresses on us the image of His Son and makes us like Him, that we may be truly His children.¹²¹

The person cleansed of all sin possesses the gift of supernatural beauty and goodness, and is pleasing to the Father. There is no rebelliousness or disobedience left in the person since all sin is removed (although concupiscence remains), and they therefore share the image of Christ by sharing in his purity and his attitude toward the Father.

The baptized person also receives the Holy Spirit, the first installment of their inheritance as children of God, just as God sent the Holy Spirit on Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan. As promised by John (1 John 3:2), they will, moreover, also receive the vision of God. Scheeben details the Father's intention in giving the gift of the beatific vision:

As He alone is worthy of Himself, and the whole world with all its goods could not make Him happy, so He alone is worthy of those whom He makes His children. And His only-begotten Son cannot inherit anything greater from Him than that He see Him face-to-face and be ever one with Him, so the Father gives to His adopted children the highest good that He can give—Himself—in order that they may be able to see and enjoy Him for all eternity in undisturbed possession of Him.

As God is infinite, as our inheritance is infinite, so likewise the dignity of the children of God is infinite, at least insofar as God is concerned.¹²²

Jesus, as man, inherited the beatific vision, thus the children of God are also heirs of the beatific vision. Scheeben notes that the magnanimity of such an inheritance reflects the infinite dignity of the sons and daughters of God. The surpassing dignity of God's children is due to the love of their heavenly Father.

¹²¹ Scheeben, *The Glories of Divine Grace*, 99.

¹²² Scheeben, *The Glories of Divine Grace*, 97-98.

Implications for Christian Life

The supreme dignity of the sons and daughters of God requires a way of life befitting the reality that one is indeed fathered by God. Firstly, children of God recognize God's authority. Being free from sin and the dominion of the evil one, their freedom is characterized by an ability and desire to follow God's will. Reasonably then, there are certain goals established by the Father and taught by Jesus Christ that should resonate in the mind of baptized Christians and take shape in their lives. Among these goals are avoiding sin, following the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and growing toward Christian perfection. Each of these goals conforms to the dignity and identity of baptized persons and offers an efficacious Gospel witness to the world. Achieving those goals is made possible by God the Father in union with Jesus through the Holy Spirit, who provides the means to accomplish them.

Although the Church provides guidance in Christian living, (she being guided by the Holy Spirit in passing on the teachings of Christ) in the case of children, especially those baptized as infants, it is the primary responsibility of parents to educate their children in the Christian way of life. Without education, no baptized person can bear the fruit of baptism or understand the responsibilities associated with it, "...if Baptism does offer the gift of remission of all sins and their punishments, it also confers upon the baptized the responsibility to live and act in response to that grace...If Baptism places a burden upon us, it also gives us the spiritual strength and resources to bear the burden."¹²³ Through the sacrament of baptism, Christians dedicate themselves to a lifelong commitment of fidelity to God. They also receive "spiritual strength and resources" that

¹²³ Kurt Stasiak, O.S.B., *Sacramental Theology: Means of Grace, Ways of Life* (Chicago, Illinois: Loyola Press, 2002), 76-77.

are the theological virtues, the infused moral virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Scheeben explains further,

While raising its recipients to the dignity of children of God, Baptism also confers upon them what they need in order to live as such. It infuses in their faculties certain supernatural principles in order to induce in them a filial attitude towards God, become their Father, and a fraternal attitude towards their fellow men, become their brethren. These principles are known as infused virtues, theological or moral, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, which always accompany grace.¹²⁴

Consequently, all baptized people have the grace they need to live divine filiation, but they need direction, particularly from parents, in how to live out that identity and tap into the “spiritual strength and resources” that the sacrament of baptism provides.

It could be argued, moreover, that while the responsibility of education belongs to both parents, it is the father that should take the lead. Consider the prayer said over the father at the baptism of his child:

God is the giver of all life, human and divine. May he bless the father of this child. He and his wife will be the first teachers of their child in the ways of faith. May they be also the best of teachers, bearing witness to the faith by what they say and do, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.¹²⁵

The liturgy of the Church assigns the role of teaching to the father in the prayer said over him. He and his wife are both responsible for teaching their child the way of faith and bearing witness to the faith by their actions, but the Church assumes that the father takes the lead in executing this responsibility. The indication that the father takes the lead in teaching the child the way of the Lord echoes many of the writings we examined in chapter two, but particularly recalls this line from *Familiaris Consortio*:

In revealing and in reliving on earth the very fatherhood of God, a man is called upon to ensure the harmonious and united development of all the members of the family: he will perform this task...*by a more solicitous*

¹²⁴ Scheeben, *The Glories of Divine Grace*, 95-96.

¹²⁵ Rite of Baptism for Children

*commitment to education, a task he shares with his wife, ...and by means of the witness he gives of an adult Christian life which effectively introduces the children into the living experience of Christ and the Church.*¹²⁶

Presumably, the father exercises the greatest amount of authority in his family and is the spiritual head of the household.

The baptismal rite also contains a prayer said over the mother at the baptism of a child. The prayer over the mother differs considerably from the prayer said over the father and mentions nothing about teaching:

God the Father, through his Son, the Virgin Mary's child, has brought joy to all Christian mothers, as they see the hope of eternal life shine on their children. May He bless the mother of this child. She now thanks God for the gift of her child. May she be one with him/her in thanking Him forever in heaven, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.¹²⁷

The focus of the prayer over the mother is joy for the gift of the child's life and the hope of eternal life, emphasizing her role as a nurturer of life.

Taking into account that the goals of the Christian life require the discipline of perseverance, it is appropriate that the father would lead his child to understand how to meet the challenge present in the daily living of Christian life. Donald Demarco asserted this in writing about the paradoxes of fatherhood,

A good father knows the value of rules and the consequences of disregarding them. He wants his children to be strong in virtue. Therefore, he knows the importance of disciplines, restraint, and self-possession. He is neither punitive nor overbearing. He makes it clear to his children that there is not true freedom without discipline, knowing how discipleship requires training.¹²⁸

Living as baptized children in the world will require constant fights against sin and continuing conversion, which requires the discipline of perseverance. As Jesus educated

¹²⁶ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 25; italics mine.

¹²⁷ Rite of Baptism for Children

¹²⁸ Donald Demarco, *Restoring the Fullness of Fatherhood*, 22.

the disciples in persevering through the way of the cross culminating with his own witness, so the father should follow Jesus' lead in educating his own children.

The second goal of the Christian life is to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

When John Paul II considered the question of how to live one's identity as a child of God, he said the following,

What does it mean, in the life of the Christian, to be a son or daughter of God: St. Paul writes 'All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God' (Rom 8:14). To be sons and daughters of God means, therefore, to receive the Holy Spirit, to let ourselves be guided by him, to be, open to his action in our personal history and in the history of the world.¹²⁹

To live as a son or daughter of God, a person needs to be attentive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their life. This requires prayer and discernment of the movements of the Spirit in one's life. Here again, the father, who is associated with providing wisdom to his children, has an important role in helping his children develop the life of prayer and the way to discern the direction of their lives and their personal vocations.

Another goal of the Christian life is to aim for Christian perfection. The very word "perfection" connotes a high and lofty goal requiring work and struggle, but a Christian can expect nothing less, "The Son of God Himself reminds us of our sublime dignity and of our destination when he says: 'Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.' (Matt. 5:48). Because we are children of God, we must not content ourselves with ordinary, human perfection, but conscious of our high dignity, we must seek to imitate the great God Himself."¹³⁰ Yet again, the father who understands that resilience takes courage guides his children not to settle for less than what they are capable of.

¹²⁹ John Paul II, *Message to Youth*, 2.

¹³⁰ Scheeben, *The Glories of Divine Grace*, 103.

One Child, Two Fathers

At this point, we have examined the scriptural testimony undergirding the teaching on divine sonship. We have also discussed the spiritual reality contained in being called a child of God connected to the sacrament of baptism. Lastly, we have considered the implications for Christian living by the baptized and the necessity of education in the way of faith, with the father undertaking a leadership role in educating the baptized child.

A question that may be asked, however, is whether a child of God the Father really needs both God the Father and his human father. Could not the child objectively be fine with “just” having God as Father, and her human mother? Similarly, what about the cases in which the child has no father present in his or her life, or a very broken relationship; could not having God as father fulfill the need he experiences for his father? In speaking about the role of spiritual fathers, Camisasca provides insight into these questions,

Fleshly fatherhood and spiritual fatherhood must never contradict one another. To the contrary, one of the fundamental tasks of the spiritual father is to help the person he is guiding to find his fleshly father again, even in the case in which the latter does not exist. A personality divorced from its natural father is an unstable and problematic personality. Where reconciliation with one’s material roots is lacking, there is no possibility for spiritual fruitfulness. If father and mother drove me out of the house or told me that they no longer wanted to see me, I must learn to forgive. Without forgiveness, there is no possibility for fruitfulness. And I can forgive only because I have been helped through the encounter with many fatherhoods, with many teachers.¹³¹

¹³¹ Camisasca, *The Father, a Source of Communion*, 545.

If a person's father is absent from one's life (physically and or emotionally, spiritually) that person has suffered a wrong that has consequences. The fatherhood of God is infinitely more perfect than the fatherhood of man, and yet he does not choose to replace a human father with himself, rather, the human father which a son or daughter can see reminds them of the divine father they cannot see. Even in the situation of his own Son, Jesus, who needed no biological father for his conception, God the Father chose Joseph to be Jesus' human father on earth.¹³²

Oftentimes it is the case, as it is in the lives of many, that a person who suffers as a result of poor human fatherhood, can and does recover a lost sense of identity through the knowledge and experience of God's loving fatherhood. It follows, though, that he needs someone to teach him about God the Father and how God's fatherhood differs from that of his human father.¹³³ In addition, spiritual fathers have a great value for those young people, men and women, whose father is missing from their life. Nonetheless, in contrast to the popular mindset of the culture, a father is necessary and irreplaceable. He has an indisputable role in helping his children live out the reality of their divine sonship. Bishop Olmsted asserts this in his exhortation to men,

There are those in our culture today, however, who do not want us to see fatherlessness as unnatural or lamentable. Do not be fooled by those voices wishing to erase all distinctions between mothers and fathers, ignoring the complementarity that is inherent in creation. Men, your presence and mission in the family is irreplaceable! Step up and lovingly, patiently take up your God-given role as protector, provider, and spiritual leader of your home... Your fatherhood, my fatherhood, in its hidden, humble way reflects imperfectly but surely the Fatherhood of God, the Father to those whom the Lord has given us to father.¹³⁴

¹³² John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, 7-8.

¹³³ Bob Bedard, CC, "The Priest as Father," *Companions of the Cross*, Summer 2015, 3-4. Fr. Bedard speaks of helping young men who have not been well-fathered to understand how God the Father fathers them.

¹³⁴ Olmsted, "Into the Breach," 20.

Bishop Olmsted affirms the place of the father as the spiritual leader of the family and the reflection of God's fatherhood on earth.

The reality of divine sonship lies in the relationship that the baptized have with God—the relationship of a father and child. The Spirit of the Father and the Son lives in the baptized making such a relationship possible. In a similar way, a human father passes on to his child the fruits and wisdom of his own spirit. As God the Father infuses virtues within his children to help them in using reason, governing their passions, and guarding their conduct, so a human father passes on to his child his own values and witness of life which help the child to make personal decisions in the future.

Chapter IV. Fatherhood, Sonship and the New Evangelization

Neither fatherhood nor sonship are new. In the words of John Paul II, the father-son relationship “is older than human history.” Comparatively, the secular trend to discount the value of fathers is new and yet has strongly made its mark in the Western world within just a few decades. Yet despite the prevailing secular trend, at the heart of Catholic faith stands God's invitation for each person to share in a timeless relationship with God the Father in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ's revelation of our relationship as children of God our Father is a message of incredible importance at this time, and in the context of the new evangelization.

Currently, there is a danger for baptized Catholics to fall into the prevailing secular attitudes of the culture of fatherlessness, rejecting the necessity of fathers or completely disregarding that they have any authority in the life of their children or families. Connected to this rejection is the continuous danger of believing that authority is opposed to freedom. Such a disregard of human fatherhood both indicates that the

privatizing of faith has grown to such an extent that it bears no influence on people's decisions in regards to bearing and raising children, and implies a lack of understanding as to why God is Father. This situation has put the Church in a position where it is necessary to do two things. First, she needs to acknowledge the effect of secularism on Catholics' understanding of fatherhood and preach with greater ardor our identity as God's children in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and what that teaching implies for men. Second, she needs to defend, support and encourage men as fathers, to assert the importance of fatherhood, and to identify the characteristics of an authentic masculinity.

Several related reasons exist for why the culture of fatherlessness is an issue to be counter-acted by the New Evangelization. Firstly, the Church in her members has the responsibility to permeate the culture with Gospel values through her words and witness and through her institutions. Second, in the last decades, more and more men have either abandoned the Catholic faith or practice it minimally, and moreover, do not educate their children in the faith. The loss of Catholic fathering leads to an overall loss of Catholics. Third, as evidenced in chapters two and three of this thesis, many people carry a father wound that needs acknowledgment and healing through forgiveness and spiritual fatherhood. If not challenged, the culture of fatherlessness will continue to threaten the content of the kerygma: the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and has reconciled us to the Father enabling us to become God's children through baptism.¹³⁵

Fighting the Cultural Tide

¹³⁵ As pointed out earlier, the threat is already present in the open attack against calling God Father because men share God's name of father, or in the attack on the role assigned by God to men by which they share in his fatherhood. Consider the analogy: if fathers are unnecessary, God the Father is unnecessary.

In October 2012, the Synod of Bishops convened to discuss “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.” At the synod, bishops from around the world identified secularism as the greatest challenge of the current time.¹³⁶ Cardinal Donald Wuerl, a member of the synod, provides his own description of the current situation, saying,

In speaking at the synod about the circumstances of our day, I pointed out that entire generations have become dissociated from the support systems that facilitated the transmission of the faith. It is as if a tsunami of secular influence has swept across the cultural landscape, taking with it such societal markers as marriage, family, the concept of the common good, and objective definitions of right and wrong.¹³⁷

The plight of fatherlessness falls into this description of the secular culture, spurred on by rampant divorce, the endorsement of non-traditional family structures, the move towards disregarding differences between males and females, and the use of reproductive technologies.¹³⁸ Coupled with secularism, another factor contributing to fatherlessness is individualism. Pope Benedict XVI spoke about this challenge during his visit to the Archdiocese of Washington in 2008. Individualism, with its emphasis on personal freedom, makes it “easy to lose sight of our dependence on others as well as the responsibilities that we bear towards them.”¹³⁹

In contrast to accepting the privatization of faith-based moral norms and the individualism of modern culture, the Popes of the last fifty years have encouraged the faithful to embrace their responsibility of evangelizing the culture. In *Evangelii*

¹³⁶ Cardinal Donald Wuerl, *New Evangelization: Passing on the Catholic Faith Today* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2013), 21.

¹³⁷ Wuerl, *New Evangelization*, 25.

¹³⁸ These realities and ideas explicitly reject the Christian understanding of human anthropology and marriage. The use of reproductive technologies often reduces the contribution of males to bringing forth life by disassociating them from the act of procreation, and furthermore, purposely introduces children into the world who may lack any knowledge of their biological fathers.

¹³⁹ Wuerl, *New Evangelization*, 26.

Nuntiandi, Pope Paul VI wrote, “the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs.”¹⁴⁰ In *Christifideles Laici*, Pope John Paul II said, “The Church is fully aware of a pastoral urgency that calls for an absolutely special concern for culture in those circumstances where the development of a culture becomes disassociated not only from Christian faith but even from human values...”¹⁴¹ There is a definite need for conversion in the American culture’s mindset about fatherhood, which requires the role of the Catholic faithful to influence society. As one archbishop aptly wrote, “Because of the pervasiveness of forces of secularism it is true that either the Church commits itself to evangelize the culture or the culture will ‘evangelize’ the Church.”¹⁴² While the gates of hell will never prevail against the Church, many of her children are in danger of succumbing to less than human influences affecting families and pervading the culture, instead of embracing opportunities to evangelize it.¹⁴³

Those striving to improve American society also voice an awareness that religion, especially Christian religion, has an important part to play in fighting fatherlessness. Donald Eberly discusses this in his essay, “The Collapse and Recovery of Fatherhood.”

Whose job is it to teach the young men to be fathers? The responsibility falls to an entire society, meaning those who lead, teach, or serve in any capacity. First and foremost, individual fathers and

¹⁴⁰ Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World-Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Vatican Website, December 8, 1975, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html (accessed March 7, 2016), 18.

¹⁴¹ John Paul II, *On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World-Christifideles Laici*, Vatican Website, December 30, 1988, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html (accessed March 7, 2016), 44.

¹⁴² Julian Porteous, *New Evangelisation: Pastoral Strategy for the Church at the Beginning of the Third Millennium* (Ballarat: Lexington Books, 2014), 90.

¹⁴³ Matthew 16: 18.

grandfathers must pass along the skills and personal devotion of fathering. But even that private role is couched in and encouraged by an assortment of institutions, including schools, media and entertainment, and the community. Most importantly, this work must be carried out by places of worship.¹⁴⁴

In other words, Eberly is describing the responsibility of the culture to form fathers, while assigning that responsibility to churches in particular. What is Eberly's rationale for claiming that institutions of worship should carry out this work? Faith based institutions have a way of renewing the culture that no other social institution does. He states,

Secular society is beginning to acknowledge that churches, synagogues, and faith-based agencies are in a position to bring about renewal that no other institutional players are capable of producing....

By wide acknowledgment, religious denominations and places of worship once strongly shaped male attitudes about their responsibilities for the nurture, moral discipline, and spiritual development of children. Also widely recognized is the fact that religious institutions have drifted away from this role, often leaving parishioners lost in a sea of confusion over gender roles, parenting responsibilities, and family life generally. The challenge today is for the faith community to recover the heritage of fathering. We must return to strengthening fatherhood, whether through theological instruction, rites of passage, celebrations, stories, marriage and family preparation, or mentoring and community outreach.¹⁴⁵

In sum, Eberly details the history of religious institutions in promoting fatherhood as well as societal expectations that they are in a position to do so. More recently, however, the rise of secularism has led society to reject any moral norms that seem to have a religious basis. David Blankenhorn, nevertheless, stresses that the strongest factor in fatherhood is "the faith factor". After identifying practical reasons for faith-based initiatives in the fatherhood movement, he writes,

But with fatherhood, just as with character education, "the faith factor" in the movement is not primarily a matter of convenience, logistics, or available leaders. It's also and most importantly first a matter of

¹⁴⁴ Don E. Eberly, ed., *The Faith Factor in Fatherhood: Renewing the Sacred Vocation of Fathering*, (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 1999), 5-6.

¹⁴⁵ Don E. Eberly, ed., *The Faith Factor in Fatherhood*, 18.

principles...hands-on human fatherhood is ultimately a spiritual calling, intimately linked to the search for transcendence....

In short, true fatherhood teaches men, in the face of much evidence to the contrary, that they are taller when they bow. Surely such a root-and-branch- moralization of male behavior can finally be understood only in spiritual terms—as the fruit of a spiritual vocation or calling, or perhaps even better, as grace, a spiritual gift. The core mystery of fatherhood, in my view, is that a bare biological act can produce such a transforming personal reality.¹⁴⁶

Blankenhorn describes a reality that the Church affirms; fatherhood is most fully understood when viewed in relation to God because fatherhood itself is based on God-given relationships.

For Catholics, the model of fatherhood is Jesus Christ who is the image of God the Father, and thus an essential part of re-evangelization is to share the person of Jesus Christ. Cardinal Wuerl says, “Throughout history there have been countless claims of heaven touching earth, which reflects the longing of the human heart for God’s presence. Yet we know that the emptiness spoken about by the prophets and reflected upon by wise men finds its fullness and satisfaction only in Jesus Christ, God and man, our Brother and Savior. Jesus is God’s Son, and his revelation to us is that the great name of God is “Father.”¹⁴⁷ Following upon the Gospel Revelation, the Church has much to say about man’s role and identity as both son and father.

The Loss of Catholic Men and Catholic Fathers

Bishop Olmsted details the current crisis of men and the Catholic Church in *Into the Breach*,

One of the key reasons that the Church is faltering under the attacks of Satan is that many Catholic men have not been willing to ‘step into the breach’—

¹⁴⁶ Don E. Eberly, ed., *The Faith Factor in Fatherhood*, xv-xvi.

¹⁴⁷ Cardinal Donald Wuerl, *New Evangelization*, 33.

to fill this gap that lies open and vulnerable to further attack. A large number have left the faith, and many who remain ‘Catholic’ practice the faith timidly and are only minimally committed to passing the faith on to their children. Recent research shows that large numbers of young Catholic men are leaving the faith to become ‘nones’—men who have no religious affiliation. The growing losses of young Catholic men will have a devastating impact on the Church in America in the coming decades, as older men pass away and young men fail to remain and marry in the Church, accelerating the losses that have already occurred....While we know that Christ welcomes back every repentant sinner, the truth is that large numbers of Catholic men are failing to keep the promises they made at their children’s baptisms—promises to bring them to Christ and to raise them in the faith of the Church.¹⁴⁸

Bishop Olmsted points out a tragic cycle. Men do not pass their faith on to their children, and in turn their children do not stay in the Church, making it more likely for those children as adults to follow secular trends in relationships with other men, women, and children. Bishop Olmsted is not alone in pointing out that the loss of Catholic men has left the Church in a vulnerable position. Robbie Low describes such a position in his article, “The Truth about Men and the Church,” basing his argument on the Swiss Study, which found that the religious practice of the father of the family is the single most important factor in predicting future church attendance by children. He concludes his article emphatically writing, “No father—no family—no faith. Winning and keeping men is essential to the community of faith and vital to the work of all mothers and the future salvation of our children.”¹⁴⁹ Inevitably, both children and men look to men who are fathers for direction in their spiritual lives.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas J. Olmsted, “Into the Breach,” 1-2. Since AD 2000, 14 million Catholics have left the faith, parish religious education of children has dropped by 24%, Catholic school attendance has dropped by 19%, infant baptism has dropped by 28%, adult baptism has dropped by 31%, and sacramental Catholic marriages have dropped by 41%.

¹⁴⁹ Robbie Low, “The Truth about Men and the Church,” *Touchstone*, June 2003, 25.

Father Hunger

The phrase, “father hunger” is not hard to understand, taking into consideration the number of children and teenagers growing up right now who have limited to no contact with their fathers. Don. E. Eberly writes that there is a “father factor” in every child’s life.¹⁵⁰ This father factor drives children to long for intimate relationship with their fathers. The father factor is particularly crucial for boys, who cannot learn “genuine” masculinity without a mature man to model it; without an example, men experience the shame of not being truly male.¹⁵¹ In contrast, men need to learn masculinity from men who live a God-centered masculinity,

Here, we find the man as he was meant to be, mirroring the true character of God. Here we find the paternal male who generates, not destroys life—the benevolent provider and defender, not the aggressor or predator. Here we discover the man who finds his strength and purpose as a father and friend, a protector and provider, and mentor and a moral example. Here we find the husband who builds up, nourishes, and honors his marriage partner.¹⁵²

Men who live this God-centered masculinity become good husbands and fathers who understand the meaning of their lives and do not find it difficult to look to God as the model for their fatherhood and as the authority in their own life.¹⁵³

Many men have grown up without having had this need met. Many women have grown up without understanding how to relate well to men. How can the Church meet their need to experience being sons and daughters? Even in the least ideal of circumstances the Church stands on the Jesus’ revelation of God as the merciful loving father who never abandons his children. Pope Benedict XVI says,

¹⁵⁰ Don E. Eberly, ed., *The Faith Factor in Fatherhood*, 24.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁵³ Don E. Eberly, ed., *The Faith Factor in Fatherhood*, 37.

God is a Father who never abandons his children, a loving Father who supports, helps, welcomes, pardons and saves with a faithfulness that surpasses by far that of men and women, opening onto dimensions of eternity.... The love of God the Father never fails, he does not tire of us; it is a love that gives to the end, even to the sacrifice of his Son.¹⁵⁴

The Church has the most effective way to meet the needs of those men and women. She reminds them of their identity as children of God. She also offers them spiritual fatherhood through her priests.

Supporting Fatherhood and Sonship through the New Evangelization

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, just six months ago, in September of 2015, Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted published an apostolic exhortation addressed to Catholic men in his diocese of Phoenix. The release of the exhortation included a website and promotional video. The exhortation has had a great affect not only on the Diocese of Phoenix but for Catholics all over the United States and the world.¹⁵⁵ Within the exhortation, Bishop Olmsted offers education and issues imperatives for Catholic men to aid them in (re)discovering a genuine Catholic masculinity and to act based on masculine love in relationships with friends, wives, and children. I would like to use this exhortation for addressing possible solutions to the culture of fatherlessness that has so affected members of the Body of Christ.

Calling Men to Identity in Christ: Challenging the Secular culture

¹⁵⁴ Benedict XVI, "General Audience I believe in God the almighty Father," Vatican Website, January 30, 2013. http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20130130.html, (accessed September 4, 2015).

¹⁵⁵ James Graves, "Film, document from Phoenix challenges men to go 'Into the Breach': Apostolic exhortation on the role of men as spiritual leaders has gained in popularity around the globe," *OSV Newsweekly*, Our Sunday Visitor, January 6, 2016, <https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/Article/TabId/535/ArtMID/13567/ArticleID/19006/Film-document-from-Phoenix-challenges-men-to-go-%E2%80%98Into-the-Breach%E2%80%99.aspx>.

It is obvious from the Bishop's opening words in the exhortation that he strives to start a re-evangelization of the culture by calling men out to battle:

I begin this letter with a clarion call and clear charge to you, my sons and brothers in Christ: Men, *do not hesitate to engage in the battle that is raging around you*, the battle that is wounding our children and families, the battle that is distorting the dignity of both women and men. This battle is often hidden, but the battle is real. It is primarily spiritual, but it is progressively killing the remaining Christian ethos in our society and culture, and even in our own homes.¹⁵⁶

Bishop Olmsted lays out the state of the culture, addressing it in spiritual terms and addresses all men, “priests and deacons, husbands, fathers and sons, grandfathers and widowers, young men in preparation for your vocation—*that is, each and every man.*”¹⁵⁷ He appeals to men as protectors of children, families, and homes, as those who have a fatherly role. To prepare men to meet this summons, Bishop Olmsted directly contradicts the popular idea that masculinity and femininity can be defined in whatever way pleases an individual, “We can say that for the first time in history, people have either become so confused or so arrogant as to attempt to dictate their masculinity or femininity according to their own definitions.”¹⁵⁸ Instead of building one's masculinity according to media images, he urges men to learn masculinity from Christ, God and man.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, he urges men not to look for their identity in materialism or power, but rather points them to their identity in Christ, beloved sons of God the Father.¹⁶⁰ The person of Jesus Christ shines forth in the exhortation. Additionally, the Bishop identifies ten saints for Catholic men to learn about and imitate.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Olmsted, “Into the Breach”, 1.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Olmsted, “Into the Breach,” 5.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 8

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 6-7.

Calling Men to a Life of Holiness: Sacraments, Scripture, and Prayer

Bishop Olmsted “charges” men to commit to a daily habit of prayer including an examination of conscience and reading of the Scriptures.¹⁶² He also enjoins on them to attend Mass every Sunday and to keep the Sabbath.¹⁶³ Bishop Olmsted refers to the example a father sets for his children by leading them to Mass and reading the Scriptures, as a way in which fathers help children to remain in the faith.¹⁶⁴ Confession should be a monthly practice.¹⁶⁵ Lastly, he instructs them to seek fraternity with other faithful Catholic men who support one another in the growth of holiness.¹⁶⁶ Catholic Men’s conferences, monthly Men’s Holy hours, and Catholic Men’s fellowship groups help fulfill the need for fraternity and Christian brotherhood.

Calling Men to Faithful Spousal Love

The Catholic Church has always stood firm on the importance of the marriage covenant between a man and woman, reaffirming through the centuries that sexual intimacy belongs exclusively within marriage.¹⁶⁷ The Church has also consistently taught that the greatest gift of marriage is the offspring produced by the love between husband and wife.¹⁶⁸ The culture of fatherlessness is in no small way due to the complete endorsement by the secular culture of uncommitted sexual relationships and contraception, along with the pleasure-seeking lifestyles that avoid any fettering to responsibility for another human being.¹⁶⁹ In contrast to the characterization of married

¹⁶² Ibid., 11.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 11-12.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ CCC 2361.

¹⁶⁸ CCC 1652.

¹⁶⁹ Olmsted, “Into the Breach”, 16.

love as boring or too conventional, Bishop Olmsted urges men not to fight against the vocation of marriage through which men live out a strength which endures and which the world needs, saying, “There is glory in man’s calling to be a husband.”¹⁷⁰ The glory of man’s calling to be a husband lies in the imitation of Christ who gave his life in sacrifice for his bride.¹⁷¹ By fulfilling their call to marriage, men proclaim a message of great importance for the world today.¹⁷² Bishop Olmsted, moreover, encourages men to the “long and exacting work” of living a life of chastity reminding men of Jesus’ own words condemning even the practices that the “world” considers normal—pornography and masturbation—and encouraging men to find their strength in the confessional and in the Eucharist.¹⁷³

Calling Catholic Men to be Fathers

Quoting the words of Pope Francis, “Fatherhood is giving life to others, giving life, giving life,” Bishop Olmsted holds that fatherhood is essential in the life of every man, regardless of whether he is physically or spiritually married.¹⁷⁴ It is in living the vocation of fatherhood, that man becomes like God.¹⁷⁵ In his home, he is the irreplaceable protector, provider, and spiritual leader.

As pointed out earlier, father wounds are significant and need tending. Acknowledging the wound many men have experienced by the absence of their own father, Bishop Olmsted offers them the faith and hope that come from having God as Father while nevertheless asserting that fatherlessness is not a part of God’s plan.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹⁷¹ Ephesians 5:25-32.

¹⁷² Olmsted, “Into the Breach”, 16.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 17-18

¹⁷⁴ Olmsted, “Into the Breach,” 20.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

Certainly fatherlessness is never God's plan. Do not give in to discouragement, however, and do not lose hope. The Church is always called to reveal God the Father. Allow Christ to show you the Father who never abandons his children, but rather offers his only begotten Son. If you have not already done so, allow Christ to guide you in order to see your father as He sees him. Jesus will not leave you without the grace to forgive and heal your father. This may happen in conjunction with the graces offered to you through your spiritual fathers, your priests, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Through your discovery of the Fatherhood of God, our loving, eternal Father, you will be witnesses to the only fatherhood that never fails.¹⁷⁶

Bishop Olmsted again offers men the affirmation that they are God's sons and points them to Jesus Christ.

Evangelization through parishes, schools, and media

In addition to direct appeals and education of Catholic men, parishes, Catholic schools, and social media have a place in society and are means of influencing the culture. Sacramental preparation is a key opportunity for educating people about their identity in Christ, and the truth of human nature including the unique vocations of men and women. Parishes also serve as excellent sites for events that call men back to the Church.

Catholic schools are called to be places of encounter with Jesus Christ and to form young people in the faith.¹⁷⁷ They are also places that build community and offer opportunities to educate parents in the teachings of the Church. Currently, Catholic schools have a wealth of education resources available for forming young men and women not only in Catholic identity, but to understand the complementarity of males and females. One example is Jason Evert's *Theology of Her Body/Theology of His Body*, in

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 21-22.

¹⁷⁷ Porteous, *New Evangelisation*, 215.

which he explains the gifts of motherhood and fatherhood for women and men, respectively.

Lastly, the digital age has made it possible for Catholic men to set up websites and podcasts specifically designed for supporting men as fathers. Others make online videos that are then passed on from person to person. Evangelization through media is a particular domain for young evangelizers. Archbishop Porteous relates how in a 2009 message to young people, Pope Benedict XVI urged young people to use their ability of engaging with new media to proclaim the Gospel.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, it is often young fathers who begin websites, blogs, and podcasts for men.

Spiritual Fathers: Priests

By virtue of their nature and vocation, priests are called to a vibrant spiritual fatherhood and leadership in drawing people together. Their witness of mature Christian masculinity is sorely needed by all Catholic men. In calling priests to teach the faithful the beauty and meaning of the liturgy, Bishop Olmsted says, “What a joy it is for men of God when they are led by priests who have a confident sense of their own masculinity, their call to participate in Christ’s spousal love, and their generous, life-giving fatherhood!”¹⁷⁹ He calls priests and deacons to bring men together for Catholic fraternity.¹⁸⁰ Priests are also often the first ones to which men and women will turn with the sorrow of having had an absent father. The founder of Companions of the Cross, Fr. Bob Bedard, CC, described it this way, “It is more critical today that you and I as priests be fathers and know how to be fathers, because we are dealing with an unfathered

¹⁷⁸ Porteous, *New Evangelisation*, 188

¹⁷⁹ Olmsted, “Into the Breach”, 6.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

generation: the unfathered sons and daughters of a previous unfathered generation.”¹⁸¹

Priests have a primary role in communicating to people on a group level and an individual level their identity as sons and daughters of God, giving them a truth they yearn to understand.

Conclusion

This thesis began with the lament of our past and current Holy Fathers over the prevalence of fatherlessness and its negative impact on understanding God as Father. Throughout the course of this thesis we have focused on the connection between fatherhood and sonship, beginning with Jesus Christ’s revelation of God’s fatherhood and our sonship in the Gospels. Then, we defined the culture of fatherlessness and viewed the evidence of its effect on our country. Next, we looked at the sociological evidence for the unique contributions of fathers and compared it to a theological understanding of the father’s role as a spiritual leader and the identity he passes on to help his children meet the world. By looking at these effects of father involvement, we saw how human fatherhood reflects divine fatherhood. Then, we read and analyzed key scriptures on the doctrine of divine filiation and the theology behind the doctrine. Lastly, we evaluated how the new evangelization can fight the culture of fatherlessness, and how that fight consists in unremitting reminders to Catholics about their identity as children of God.

In the yearning of children, men, and women for their fathers, is evidence of a desire for relationship over individualism, a desire for guidance and discipline over

¹⁸¹ Fr. Bob Bedard, CC, “The Priest as Father”, *Companions of the Cross*, Summer 2015, 3.

complete autonomy, and a desire for God's design of family over the constructions of secular society. As evidenced by Bishop Olmsted's fatherly apostolic exhortation to Catholic Men and the example of countless other priests, deacons, and laymen who are engaged in the work of forming men to be good husbands and fathers, the Church has all the means to call men forth to their God-given vocation of learning from Jesus Christ the way to imitate the Father, and she has the backing of the sociological evidence. As the battle continues, I fittingly end with a quote from *Into the Breach*,

Since this *is* our identity—being beloved sons of God the Father—is it surprising that the devil is waging a fierce battle on masculinity and fatherhood in our day? The process of Christian conversion includes coming to know God's love and experiencing brotherhood with Christ who deepens our identity as sons of the Father in the Holy Spirit. This is our lifelong goal and our spiritual battle.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Olmsted, "Into the Breach", 8.

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