

The Missing Icon: Masculine Fraternity and the Priesthood

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The simple shepherds and sophisticated wisemen who celebrated the birth of Jesus were joined by a twisted tyrant. The sounds of Herod's party were the cries of murdered infant males and the weeping of Rachel. His act was a grisly reprise of Pharaoh's decree at the birth of Moses. He foreshadowed the killers of Kosovo who did not slay the infant boys to prevent a future king but emptied villages of teen age males so armies of revenge would have no one to conscript. In the Book of Revelation a ravenous red dragon awaits the birth of the male infant. Satan and tyrants know male leadership and male armies are dangerous for the devil and tyrants. They murder in fear of the sacrificial death and courage that might oppose their evil and build a new kingdom. The resonance of masculinity and sacrificial death for the community sounds a powerful aesthetic argument for the male priesthood. But there is another argument-a sacramental and anthropological one.

The Catholic Church is unabashedly patriarchal -asserting in liturgy and creed that God our Father is almighty (*patros arkos* means rule of the father). His name should be holy. His day should be sacred and all men should acknowledge that He rules the earth as His kingdom. The Church is

also hierarchical in the original meaning of the word. It is ruled by the *hieroi*-the priests. This hierarchy is all male. There is only one election held and that is only when the head male dies. The electors are all males who have been chosen by the previous head males. Let's face it -it's a self perpetuating male dominated system.

Pope John Paul II had been challenged by feminists who exposed this structure of patriarchy, fraternity and hierarchy as a ruse for the more sinister reality of sexism. They protested to the pontiff and pleaded that he open the priesthood to "half the human race". The pope refused to play the tyrant. He did not *ex cathedra* forbid the ordination of women. Rather, he explained the nature of the papacy. He said he had no authority to end the masculine character of the priesthood. He could no more change its masculine character than he could alter the male- female character of marriage. To Orthodox Christians separated from Rome and wary of papal tyranny, his restraint was an olive branch. The modern feminist could not see that her ordination would be a reactionary and dictatorial use of the papal office. But the Pope viewed her request against a wider horizon. He said he is only the pope. He is not a magician but holds the limited Petrine office in service of a larger project. He cannot conjure the Eucharist from crackers or the priesthood from women.

True to our age the argument that some sacraments are ontologically tied to gender is contested not only for the priesthood but for marriage as well. But the criticism of the male-female character of marriage is more proof of the arrogant overreach of the present day sexual rebels. It reminds us of a deeper truth which they have missed: the sexual anthropology of accord. We cannot talk about the ordering of our loves without talking about masculinity and femininity. The priesthood and marriage are sacramental bonds of Christian love. Marriage is a sign of the private intimacy of romance, procreation, and domestic life. The priesthood is the icon of the Twelve led by Peter. Christ ordered his disciples “to love one another as I have loved you”. He said that the world would know they were his disciples by that love. How he loved this band of men is at the core of apostolic succession and the mission to evangelize. Faithfully to repeat that love is to form the collegiality at the heart of the public Church and her hierarchy. Such a Eucharistic understanding flows from the teaching of Vatican II, that the office of the bishop is inherently relational to the original Twelve, to the liturgical priestly action, to the present body of bishops and to the Petrine office. Ecclesial acts of the local church centered on a bishop and his priests are grounded in these antecedent relationships.

The anthropological dimension of “hierarchical communion” is grounded in the natural tendency of men to form public life by adopting communal roles and accepting the authority of leaders. Male relations are also “anthropologically evangelical” because male communion can be strengthened by adding members unrelated by blood. Marriage is generative by procreating children. Masculine communion is fruitful by extending the brotherhood. Most priests have heard the “bridegroom argument” and the “standing in the person of Christ” argument for a male priesthood. Many Catholics know John Paul II’s anthropology of the male- female nature of marriage found in the “theology of the body.” What is missing is a “theology of the corporate body” illuminating the male priesthood by examining the character of masculine fraternity.

Masculine Fraternity and the Scandal

Renewing the evangelistic and Eucharistic nature of the priesthood offers a strategy for combating the clerical abuse scandal. How religious orders, dioceses and Episcopal synods foster the leadership and fraternal love that will strengthen the doubting Thomas, forgive the errant Peter and expel the traitorous Judas will determine church renewal in the next decades.

This radical reform can only come from a masculine holiness marked by the first fruit of male fraternity: courage. The individualistic piety of many “conservative” priests cannot renew the ossified and decadent relationships that now characterize the Catholic clergy unless their piety bears fruit in public and corporate courage. New male leaders will call their brothers into a personal and communal relationship which will animate the renewed monastery, the local priesthood and even the national bishop’s conference. The masculine Christian love of a male leader for his men “as I loved you” will inspire the courageous acts of fraternal correction needed to expose the criminal and frankly demonic cliques that have corrupted so much of our clerical culture.

. The muting of the masculine character of the priesthood has played no small role in the failure of fidelity and authority that lies at the heart of the priesthood scandal. Several recent books on priestly formation proclaim as received wisdom that “gay” seminarians are more relaxed and competent in developing intimate relationships with other men. One goes on to argue that the gay male seems to have a special affinity for relating to women also.

Well, girlfriend, allow another thought.

A disordered notion of male love corrupted the priestly masculine fraternity and fostered a culture of deceit that allowed unspeakable crimes in

the name of the Church. Friendship and comradeship turned erotic and inevitably sentimental, weak, cliquish, and self indulgent. This was tolerated by a neutered managerial clericalism incapable of exercising fatherhood through interrogation, dialogue and discipline. Emasculating the priesthood depersonalizes the priestly communion, severs priests from the wider brotherhood of all men and detaches them from the adventurous Galilean and the courageous fraternity who carried His presence into the Roman world. What incest does to families, homosexuality does to the priesthood. By disrupting individual relations, it corrupts the communal identity. Incestuous families are scattered and lose their sense of domestic unity. An erotically polluted priesthood fractures into cliques and loses its missionary character. Homosexuality in the priesthood is incest in the brotherhood. Who calls this love?

Let the Church teach the World

The American prison population at the century's turn has risen to two million (94% male). We will have to remove the feminist brain implants of the modern thought police to appreciate that *adelphos, ecclesia, and polis* are related in a deep and fundamental way. The crisis in Christian masculinity has rendered American civic society incapable of socializing

young males. The Church in America has been as articulate as Peter in the courtyard frightened by the new maidservant of feminism. The maidservant taunts, but Peter dare not cringe again. For forty years the Church has been tutored in the lessons of the sexual revolution. It is the Church's turn to teach the world the proper ordering of the loves and bonds that sustain community. The adolescents have had the professor's chair too long. The "gay" ideology of false and delusive intimacy will shrink before an adult masculine bond of solidarity. Betrayed by a bankrupt atheistic psychology, men now seek the rich storehouse of Christian anthropology. The church is ordered in a certain way to teach the world what the world really is but doesn't know yet. The Church owes it to the world to be who Christ called her to be not to baptize the latest fifty year old fad of the last century. Christ's men must teach and live the truth. If the voice does not waver, if the brotherhood reasserts itself, especially women of good will and intelligence will ask "what took you so long?"

Patriarchy, fraternity, marriage and Mary: the sexual iconography of the Church

The Fatherhood of God is not a psychological construct projected upon God by men. We Christians assert that the Fatherhood of God predates man and all of material creation. Before there was matter there was fatherhood. The Fatherhood of God is rooted in the Trinitarian relationship of the Father to the Son. God the Father expresses the personhood of God, the relational nature of personhood, and the consonance of authority and equality among persons. The revelation of Christ that He is God and that His Father sent Him is our source for knowing about God the Father. Christ told us God is Father. No one could figure that out on his own—not in most fervent prayer, nor in deepest contemplation, nor through the most profound reasoning. The pagans might have guessed it but it was only a guess. Patriarchy is a lesson of revelation.

The apostolic fraternity of the priesthood was instituted by Christ on the night before he died when he gave the Twelve a remembrance of His Pasch in the Eucharist. He called together the Twelve and left them the liturgical action at the heart of the church. He did not build the church on a marriage, not on the love between a man and a woman-- but on a public work of a band of men, on the Twelve. That night those men entered into a new relationship with one another and with Christ. They formed that circle of communion that would be manifested as Christ's body when He left to be

reunited with his Father. Therefore the priesthood is a relationship—a transformed group relationship of men with one another under the headship of Christ. That relationship is built on the act of making Christ present in the world. Christ is made personally present in the life of the Church by men who have entered into an apostolic relationship which ordains them to perform a liturgical act that links love, sacrifice and historical memory. To say the Church is apostolic is to acknowledge this primary relationship at her core. To recognize this relationship is likewise to foresee a new possibility for all men (as men) to achieve brotherhood. This defense of the male priesthood, the primary defense of its masculine nature, is rooted in its relational character. The male priesthood is a community of persons—like the Trinity, like the church, like marriage and the family, like political communities, like our hope for humanity. The priestly community of persons has a particular character precisely because it is a group of males. That character is fundamentally linked to the church's mission as a repository of public memory, a mediator to the life of the Trinity, an authoritative voice of the good news, and a missionary movement seeking souls.

Let us admit that the priesthood is a social construct; and let us remember it was constructed by the Son of God, the second person in the Trinity. Let

us assume He has a pretty good handle on how to effect a permanent and meaningful social relationship. When we evaluate the question of women's ordination we are not asking a question about the individual male priest as a sign of the male Christ. When we discuss the male priesthood we are really asking about a relationship. Is a male group relationship fundamentally denatured by a female member? It is the same question we ask about marriage—does its anthropological and sacramental meaning rest on gender and number. Is marriage irrevocably a male and female couple and is the priesthood irrevocably a male group?

Christ left His presence on earth in the ordered relationship of the Twelve. In Catholic sacramental life, the priesthood and the Eucharist cannot be separated. Our argument here in fact is best described as proposing a Eucharistic masculinity pointing to the character of the priesthood and church. It is entirely analogous to the spousal character of the body pointing to the particular communion of persons which is marriage. The Catholic Church has understood these two communities to be sacramentally ordered and lifelong in the character they confer to their members. The Fatherhood of God, the masculine nature of the apostolic fraternity and the male female nature of marriage are completed by the

feminine face of Mary and the church. These four realities constitute the sexual iconography of the Church.

Becoming men before becoming Priests

If the masculine character of the priesthood is essential to its meaning then the formation of priests is not a spiritual task alone. We will not understand the priesthood if we have lost a natural understanding of manhood.

American men come into the seminary from an inverted culture at once desexualized and sex-saturated. Often good young men come into the priesthood. Too often they possess a devout faith but an immature masculine character. Grace builds on nature and there can be no integral priesthood without integral men. As Phillip Rieff in The Triumph of the Therapeutic (1963) says, “The Christian model of man dominant for 1500 years has given way to the psychological man. The soul which is ordered by external reality has been replaced by the self. The Christian character is organized around faith and ordered to the truth of salvation. The psychological man revolves around self and the adjustment of self to reality.” “A dominant culture” says Rieff, “shapes types of personalities that carry the culture to the world”. The “Catholic moment”, “the Church as culture” needs a

personality to carry its truth. The communal and masculine personality of the priest will become the “bearer of the culture.” That was the plan of Christ and the genius of Benedict. Both the founding of the Christian *communio* and its monastic renewal were events institutionalized by ordered masculine fraternities.

A renewed priesthood will be enhanced by a renewed masculinity in the broader Catholic and civic culture. Fifty years ago American movies displayed such character types. Orphan boys were shaped into fighting moral men of character in *Boystown*. Workers and priests collaborated in civic and workplace duties in *On the Waterfront*. Soldiers shaped by Catholic piety defended their country and the freedom of other peoples in *The Fighting O’Sullivans*.

Today’s inverted culture has produced a very different hero. The sexual revolution honored the career feminist liberated from maternal duty by abortion. She was flanked by the “gay” Episcopalian bishop explaining the arcane theology of his special love for his new male partner. Soldiers, policemen, fathers and mothers—all the adult protectors had a tough half-century during the great inversion. The reemergence of a protective male will entail a dramatic change in the status of whom we honor and what we shun.

The young males who are to stand in the place of Christ as priests must first understand themselves as men who mature by separating from the world of mother and family to enter a public realm of risk, danger and challenge. Seminaries do not need more female instructors but more masculine experiences which may entail mission territory more than hospital rotations. When Mary found Jesus teaching in the temple, he explained the anthropological truth: “I must be about my Father’s business.”

PART TWO

The mission of the priesthood and the nature of male groups

The mission of the priest is to sanctify, teach, and govern. He is ordained to make Christ present in the world so through Him we might partake in the life of the Trinity.

There are three charisms of the male group which make it an especially effective sign of Christ’s continual presence in the church: Male groups are public, authoritative and protective.

To Sanctify (Male groups as Public))

The priesthood is meant to sanctify. The call to holiness is not a privatized affair. The Church is holy because she shares in the life of the Trinity by conforming to the person of Christ. This becoming Christ is most fully expressed in her public acts of the liturgy. Christians gain access to the internal life of the Trinity through the sacraments and the priesthood. The special election of the Jews, the unique identity of Christ and the exclusive rights and duties of the priesthood are all linked in the scandalous specificity of Christian revelation. The really “unfair” proposition is not that only males may become priests but that even among men, God selects only a few to exclusively represent the obedience of Calvary liturgically. By their special election, the Twelve and their successors carry out the priestly act of Christ. We laymen are not diminished thereby. We are no more insulted by the special, elevated and indispensable roles of priests than by the particular call to Abraham or the uniqueness of the Jewish mother who was chosen to give birth to a Messiah.

Our liturgical life repeats Christ’s life through time. We become a people set apart through baptism but it is the official liturgical acts of the church which perform the priestly mission of the Church most fundamentally. Full participation by the laity means engaging the “heart and intellect” of the layman in the sacerdotal activity of the hierarchy. (The Benedictine liturgical

pioneer Virgil Michel and the European monks he translated in the early years of the American liturgical renewal teach this with a simple beauty and clarity). The way the Church sanctifies is by drawing all of us into the life and sacrifice of Christ. This is done through the priesthood in a public liturgy –that is the “Catholic thing.” Christ bequeathed that mediating visible role to a communion of persons-the Twelve. We are all richer for His gift.

The public nature of the Eucharistic and the Paschal Mystery defines the Church in the world. It is a bold public seizure of time and space proclaimed by a band of men constituted by their Savior King. The priesthood shapes a people by sacramental acts which mark the weekly, yearly and personal cycles. This ingenious teaching strategy inherited from the Jews harnesses the cyclical time of the day, the week and the year to tell the story of Christ’s entrance into history. Keeping Catholic time infuses the cosmic and biological cycles with moral lessons. The sanctification of time is impossible except as a corporate and public act. It takes weight to reorient. To sanctify time is to reorient the center of gravity of the physical world around the moral axis of a Divine Person. The male group in communion is a powerful sign of this gravitational reorientation.

Male groups are by their very nature public. Unlike marriage and familial relationships, male community is not directed toward intimacy. To

tackle big tasks- to build a city, to fight a war, or to organize seasonal food storage takes the cooperation of many hands. Indeed such great tasks need the formation of a communal public personality. Forming that public personality, producing that fundamental ingredient of social capital is the real purpose of an age old command—“be a man”. The male priesthood ordains manhood into the ultimate “bridging social capital.” Manhood as a set of public duties assigned not by race or class but gender builds “wide radius trust”. That is the kind of trust which allows large public groups to form—not built on privatized loyalties but on shared duties and the love of some greater good which makes claims on an individual’s personality.

The male group as an icon of public life brings us in contact with the cosmological nature of the church. Men seek adventure and explore frontiers. Men are phototropic. They look out into time and space to find the truth. There they meet the total Other-the Living God who reveals Himself as Creator of the universe-He who is calling the whole physical process back into ordered love with Him. For forty years in popular culture and sadly in many of our seminaries male groups have been defined as inherently oppressive. But the kingdom of God is built on a city not a marriage. This public dimension is often obscured in parish life which is so often engulfed by the “one big happy family” model. We are family(really a patriarchal

household) but even more deeply we are one body and even more broadly we are a kingdom. The wide radius nature of male agreement allows our liturgical life to be a template for the Trinity, a sign of cosmological breadth, a model for civic agreement and a promise for the brotherhood of mankind.

(If the Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin missed the significance of evil in the world he certainly articulated profound insights about the physical cosmic nature of Christology, priesthood, the Eucharist and the church. One might even venture in speculative memory of Chardin that there is something about the proper distancing and ordering of multiple like beings (males) that reflects a reality in the cosmos that the male female dyad does not.)

The priesthood incarnates this universal dimension in a local church in a particular diocese around a singular bishop. The Christian narrative is taught by this group of men unrelated by kinship because the truth of the Christian proposition is bigger than any family, kinship group, or nationality. It is a particular story but it widens the stage and perspective of every man who tells it and every believer who hears. The priesthood is organized around a public act—the liturgical act of making Christ's death, resurrection and reign in heaven present to the world. The masculine communion of the priesthood is not an end in itself. It does not seek intimacy for itself. The apostolic fraternity is always in public service of the sacerdotal task of bringing

humanity and all of creation back into the ultimate locus of holiness - communion with the Trinity.

To Teach(Male Groups as Authoritative)

The priesthood teaches the story of the Gospel. The boring and stifling miniaturization of life that secularism imposes on the individual and the cosmos is answered by the dynamism of the Christian narrative. Our God lives in a Trinity and has invited us to participate in that love. Even though we have sinned, He became man to reintegrate us in that loving community of persons that is the Trinity. How can an individual as an individual tell such a tale? Revelation depends on an authoritative and credible witness. Because male groups order the protective life of a community they constitute the most convincing icon of authority. Imagine Christ walking the streets of Jerusalem or smaller cities flanked by His fishermen and filled out with “the seventy” and other men attracted to His strength, clarity, and powers of healing. When he multiplied the loaves there were 5000 men in attendance. Reflect on the orderly and space filling presence of Jesus and his men. The Pharisees said “we could not take Him-the crowds would not let us.” Ask if

the only time Jesus' followers were armed was the night of the Last Supper. Armed or not, a masculine presence turned upside down the moral center of gravity in a city ruled by the Roman Empire and guided religiously by Judaism.

Do not fear the physical nature of Christ's dominance. Do not be frightened by the male presence on an altar when fifty male priests concelebrate. Christ did not fear authority. He healed the sick, cast out the demons and stilled the winds of the sea. He spoke to large groups of men some armed and some not and he was clearly in authority over the group. He commanded all these men together then parted their circle of strength and said "suffer the children unto me."

Establishing authority is an obligation. Authority is necessary for community. Male groups establish authority. We do this because communal action is necessary to live through the inclemency of seasons or the disappearance of food. Men organize authority because there is evil in the world. Criminals need to be disciplined by authority or they will prey on the weak. Outside groups of males will pillage the bounty of work if there is no male group preventing them. The widows and orphans need someone to care for them. They too need authority to insure that not only the intact and powerful families are cared for. But it is not just the state of disorder, the

needs of the weak or the existence of evil that evoke authority. In *Dei Verbum* (Vatican II document on Revelation) the only time the actual word “*traditio*” is used is to describe the handing over of the teaching *authority* by the apostles to their successors through the ages. The Scriptures, the liturgy, the sacraments, theological teachings, - all of them can be handed down because authority has been handed down. This communal form of authority—Christ at the head of an elect body of men is a form particularly suited to preaching a gospel that must be proclaimed. The very structure of Revelation—that God’s presence and purpose must be explained (not attained by private reason) necessitates authority. The world has a story and a purpose and it is very good news indeed. This must be passed on. It has been revealed and now it must be proclaimed. This is the ultimate purpose of authority. It is not a new family but a new Kingdom which is being proclaimed. The Covenant foreshadowed by circumcision and fulfilled in the priesthood orders masculine authority to the mission of preaching this good news. Christ ordered a male group in His image obeying the will of the Father. Ultimately that is the source of their authority. The fact that he left this on a biological substrate of men in groups will seem obvious to converts in China, Africa, and India even if it is offensive to a tenured female theologian in Canada.

To Rule (Male groups as Protective)

The priesthood is meant to rule. The need for governance and protection implies a good to be protected and an evil to be protected against. Male groups remember that the contours of life are shaped as a battlefield. This particular characteristic of the male group -that there is an internal group and an external group- postures the community to recognize the Being of Evil “prowling the world seeking the ruin of souls.” Male groups stand in agreement but with an eye cast to the perimeter. Vigilance is a fundamental Christian posture as is the contest. Christ did not tell Peter to put down the sword because there was no one to fight. He had bigger fish to fry. Christ had to pass through Roman torture to break into the real enemy’s camp and sunder the gates of hell. Universally the relationship that best assumes the duty of public contest and struggle is the masculine protective agreement. No NFL football team would consider facing the enemy in any other formation. The priesthood fights a rather bigger battle guarding the truth of revelation and the living Presence of God upon a cosmic battleground. Blessed are those protective peacemakers “who shall be called sons of God”.

Fraternal Communion serving the mystery of the Eucharist and the formation of Civic Order

A vocation to priesthood is a call by a living fraternity of men to another man to partake in the fellowship that Christ established on the roads of Galilee and ordained in the upper room. Come and be with us! We have found the Messiah. Come and follow Him! The fraternity carries out the Eucharistic mandate. Laymen are imprinted by the Eucharist with a renewed spousal sensibility, a deepened appreciation of fatherhood as well as a Christocentric experience of public fraternity. That fraternal bond is meant to be approximated with men across the world in forming a public brotherhood of charity. Just as the priesthood is locally manifested in a territorial diocese, the lay brotherhood finds a natural patriotic expression in civic bodies of nations, states and cities. These masculine communions serve some larger group than themselves but all of them are bound by duties, obligations, and memories that necessitate exclusivity. The disabling confusion about the masculine nature of the priesthood has wounded the church and left the nations bewildered. The proper ordering of our loves, the dependence of a culture of life on a properly ordered culture of protection, and the sexual nature of ordered accord are truths that the world rightfully

expects to learn from the Church -“the expert on humanity.” The Ecclesial Expert should find her voice because the evil one’s falsetto compensates for its lack of authority by growing ever more shrill and noxious.

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