

Theological Andrology

“What it means to be a *real man* within a Christian perspective”

Introduction

This lecture will sketch out an understanding of what it means to be a “real man” within a Christian context. Gradually over the past few decades, for several reasons, boys and men have been suffering from an identity crisis, which is having an impact on all of society. We also see the consequences within the Church, which has seen a diminution of male-oriented groups like the Holy Name Society and the St. Vincent de Paul Society and a gradual feminization of various parts of Church life.

With this larger context, it is somewhat urgent to return to the question, “What does it mean to be a man from God’s perspective?” What is man’s vocation? (For the sake of this talk, “man” will be used in a restricted sense, meaning male human beings, what would be signified by *vir* in Latin and *andros* in Greek.) There are lots of competing answers and models on the market today of what it means to be a man, from exaggerated, hyper-testosterone forms of machismo to a weak, unassertive, supine fear of women to everything in between. But God who created the human person in his own likeness, male and female, had something in mind with this original differentiation between Adam and Eve. To discuss the question of what it means to be a man, we need to go back to man’s origin and to man’s destiny. That’s what we’re going to try to do here.

The talk will be divided into three parts:

- 1) What is man’s vocation? Is man’s vocation distinct from woman’s vocation?
- 2) Two practical illustrations of authentic masculine virtues from a Christian perspective.
- 3) Contemporary challenges to the cultivation of real Christian men.

I. Man’s Vocation

A. Man’s vocation is inserted within the vocation of the human person, which is to love.

- 1) God is love (1 John 4:16) and we’re made in his image and likeness (Gen 1:26). For us to be fully whom God created us to be, to be most like God, we need to love. For us to be most human, we need to love.
- 2) The Blessed Trinity is precisely a communion of persons in love. He created man and woman to be a communion of persons in love, modeling the Trinity (Gen 1:27-28).
- 3) When we look at the Genesis account of the creation of Adam and Eve, we observe several salient items:
 - a) As Pope John Paul II so beautifully describes in his Catecheses on the Theology of the Body, Adam had God all to himself in the Garden of Eden, he was perfectly in the state of grace, he had named all of creation and his relationship with creation was perfectly ordered. He seemed to have it all, but he was lonely. God realized that it was not good for man to be alone, so he created Eve. He took her out of his side, to symbolize the equality between the two of them, that they were meant to stand “side-by-side” in front of God. Finally Adam was able to rejoice, “This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”
 - b) Eve’s vocation was to overcome Adam’s loneliness and original solitude and teach him how to love: how to love another, and through that analogy of love, how to love himself and most importantly God. Adam’s vocation, correlatively, was to help Eve learn how to love.
- 3) The original difference between man and woman, from the first man and woman to every man and woman alive today, is meant to help us learn how to love. But this raises the question of what true love is.

B. To love is to give of oneself for another.

- 1) Love is not a warm feeling of attraction on our insides, but is something far deeper.
- 2) Christ tells us what true love is during the Last Supper and then showed us what it meant the following day on the Cross: “No one has any greater love than to lay down his life” for another (Jn 15:13).
- 3) Love is this gift of self to another, sacrificing of one’s own interests, desires and even life, for the sake of another.

- 4) Pope John Paul II in his catecheses on the Theology of the Body says just this, that true love is the gift of oneself to another. Mutual love is an exchange of selves. Married love is an exclusive exchange of selves, blessed by God, for life.
- 45 This true love, this gift of one-self to another, implies a responsibility for the other for whom one is sacrificing and giving. Love coexists with Responsibility, as the future Pope John Paul II wrote in 1960 in his very influential book, *Love and Responsibility*. Love without responsibility for the other's good is not love at all.

C. The vocation of man: Is it different from the vocation of woman?

- 1) The vocation of man and woman is to love — to give of themselves in love — and also to help others learn how to love.
- 2) Angelo Scola, now the Patriarch of Venice, but longtime head of the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family in Rome, pointed out that men and women do experience and carry out this vocation to love differently. There is a complementary in the way they love.
 - a) Men, in giving of themselves in love, receive love in return. They receive by giving.
 - b) Women, in receiving love, give love in return. Women give by receiving.
 - c) This truth is shown physiologically, in the design of the human act of making love: a woman makes love and gives of herself by receiving the gift of man; a man makes love and receives love by giving of himself physically to the woman.
 - d) The argument can be made that this “original differentiation” in loving is also true psychologically and spiritually.
 - 1) Man needs to be allowed to give, in order to receive love. Women must be humble enough to receive these gifts of men.
 - 2) Woman needs to be allowed to receive, in order to be able best to give love. Man needs to allow the woman to receive him, his day, etc.
 - 3) Women and men are meant to help each other learn how to love by this constant process of the giving and receiving of the gift of self, in an ever-ascending spiral, to become a communion of persons in love.

II. Two illustrations of what it means to love as a man

- A. These truths about human love in general, and masculine love in particular, may be very beautiful, but we need to make this teaching more practical. We can give two illustrations of how a man is called to love as a man, giving of himself to another and receiving so much in return by this self-gift.
- B. **St. Joseph** — He taught Jesus what it meant to be a man, so he can teach us as well. His holy, masculine, virtuous life could be summarized under four characteristic virtues:
 - 1) Fatherhood — This involves three elements:
 - a) He was a Protector
 - i) of Mary and her reputation
 - ii) of Jesus, giving up livelihood to take him into Egypt to save his life.
 - b) He was a Provider — as carpenter, provided for the Holy Family.
 - c) His life shows us that the full gift of self does not necessarily include genital sexuality.
 - 2) Obedience
 - a) Three times obeyed God through his angel, to take Mary as his wife, to flee with them to Egypt, and to return. Even though he could have deconstructed the dreams and doubted God's command, he didn't. He obeyed them immediately, even though something like the virginal conception of the Lord would have exceeded anyone's ability to comprehend naturally and could have been accepted only on the basis of obedient faith.
 - b) He doesn't see obeying God as incompatible with his manliness, but obviously a great part of it. He does not see God's omnipotence as a threat and doesn't have to be in control.
 - 3) Speaks more by action than by words
 - a) Never says a word in Sacred Scripture, yet his actions are remembered to this day.
 - b) The vast majority of communication is non-verbal, the experts tell us, and he communicated his great love and integrity.
 - c) He was not only an “idle listener” but a “doer” of the Word of God (cf. James 1:22).
 - 4) He showed a deep love and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who helped him grow as a man of God. She helped him give of himself to God.
- C. **Soldier** — The second set of virtues we can take by analogy with a good soldier.
 - 1) We'll see the theological relevance of these virtues shortly.
 - 2) The typical traits of a good soldier, especially one fit for battle, are the following:
 - a) Willing to die for others to protect them
 - b) Willing to fight for what he believes in

- c) Follows the chain of command — doesn't consider it a threat
 - d) Dutiful, even when heroism is required
 - e) Loyal to others and to principles.
 - f) Sees sacrifice as an opportunity to show his character, as an opportunity to demonstrate love.
 - g) Actions generally speak louder than words
 - h) Tender and compassionate, without being soft
 - i) Courageous
- 3) The theological relevance of each of these can be seen readily because everything said about a good soldier can be said, without a stretch, about Christ.
- a) He was willing to die for others, namely, for us.
 - b) He was willing to fight for what he believes in, as showed time and again in his disputations with the Pharisees. He believed ultimately in God's love, and acted upon it until death on a Cross.
 - c) He followed the divine chain of command and didn't consider it a threat: "I have come to do the will of him who sent me;" "Father, not my will, but thine be done."
 - d) He was dutiful, even when heroism is required, as when he willingly laid down his life out of obedience to the Father.
 - e) He was loyal to his disciples, never abandoning them despite their abandoning him; to the Israelites, despite the many times they broke God's covenant.
 - f) He saw sacrifice as an opportunity to show his character, as an opportunity to demonstrate love. "No one has greater love than to lay down his life for his friends."
 - g) Actions generally speak louder than words — The greatest homily he ever gave came when he mounted the pulpit for the last time, the pulpit of the Cross, and said only seven words, but the message he gave from the Cross speaks louder than all the books of Sacred Writ together.
 - h) Tender and compassionate, without being soft — He who was meek and humble of heart (caring for the woman caught in adultery, having pity on the crowds, having particular pity on parents and widows) was also capable of driving money changers from the temple with a whip, calling Pharisees whitewashed sepulchers, and pronouncing himself the "stronger man" who would bind the devil and share his spoils.
 - i) Courageous — Courage is precisely doing what ought to be done despite one's fears, as Jesus showed this time and again, but especially during the Agony and on Good Friday.
- D. The real, Christian man, will share these virtues, because they were the virtues of Christ and the virtues of the man, St. Joseph, to whom God the Father entrusted teaching his Only begotten Son how to be a man.

III. Contemporary challenges to the formation of masculine men

Cultures have a tremendous impact in the formation of people's personalities, and contemporary western culture is making it more and more difficult for men to develop the virtues and characteristics of a real man in Christ. We can focus above all on three contemporary challenges after describing how the perversion of masculinity and of masculine ideals occurs.

- A. The perversion of masculinity
- 1) If authentic masculinity shows itself in the true gift of oneself, then the perversion of masculinity is manifested when a man becomes a taker rather than a giver.
 - 2) JP II's discussion on lust in his *Theology of the Body* shows how lust can indeed do this to a man, changing his entire approach to life. Rather than seeing others as invitations to give of himself in love, as subjects worthy of love, he begins to see others as objects whom he can use, from whom he can take, for his own benefit or gratification.
 - 3) Love goes with responsibility, and the perversion of masculinity often is a result of a dissociation of what is understood to be love and authentic responsibility.
 - 4) Each of the three contemporary challenges I'll mention attacks the formation of this responsible love.
- B. Challenge #1: Our culture no longer cultivates responsibility in young men
- 1) In former days, boys were trained in responsibility, which trained them in authentic love.
 - a) By 8 or 10, they were given real responsibility on the farm, and the family was depending upon them to do it well for the family's well-being or even survival.
 - b) Higher mortality rates among their fathers often made young boys precociously the "men of the house."
 - c) In non-agrarian households, oftentimes they were out being apprenticed or working at very early ages, to support their birth families.

- d) Older boys were generally given supervisory roles in the protection and discipline of younger siblings.
 - e) They were marrying much younger and were called upon to provide for a family at much younger ages.
 - f) All of these factors, which counted on a young man's being trustworthy and responsible at very young ages, helped them to learn how to give of himself in responsible, dutiful love of others.
- 2) Today, this education in responsibility is not being cultivated as it once was.
 - a) One of the consequences of a culture in which many more people are going on to college and to advanced degrees is that, for many, real direct responsibility for others is deferred.
 - b) Families are much smaller today, so young boys often have much less responsibility for siblings than in past days. Moreover, with smaller families, the odds that a child will be spoiled increases.
 - c) Marriage is being delayed until, in many circumstances, the late 20s and 30s, and the responsibility associated with marriage put off beyond the real formative years.
 - 3) We consciously have to help young boys become more responsible, more masculine, by giving them some responsibility.
 - a) Overprotective parents, who do not cultivate trust and responsibility in their children, can do incalculable harm, especially to young boys.
 - b) Chores should be given, not just as means to accumulate allowances, but to take genuine responsibility for the good of the home.
 - c) Studies can be done with tangible reference to the responsibilities they will have later, as husbands, fathers, professionals, etc. What they are doing now can be more explicitly done with responsible love for others who will come later.

C. Challenge #2: The culture of irresponsibility in sexuality

- 1) Rather than a means to encourage men to become responsible and truly loving, the contemporary culture of sexuality encourages men to be irresponsible "takers," rather than givers.
- 2) Young people are helped by this culture to become consumers of others for the sake of pleasure, rather than responsible lovers, caring for and treasuring the others' gifts and never trying to take advantage of others.
- 2) Abortion is one example of the evil fruits of this culture. Rather than force men, young or old, to take responsibility for children they father, abortion, especially among teenagers and collegians, trains them in irresponsibility, even to the point of allowing and encouraging the killing of one's own offspring to save one from the consequences and duties that flow from sexual activity. Abortion just continues the irresponsibility that had probably been involved in the sexual relations that led to the conception of the child. This leads to the next factor in the culture of irresponsibility in sexuality:
- 3) The contraceptive mentality in our culture encourages young men (and women) to divorce sexuality from the natural consequences of sexual activity. This allows men much more easily to use women in sexuality rather than learn how to love through sexuality linked to genuine responsibility (which can only be found in a loving marriage). To be responsible, sex must be bound to a loving marriage and open to children, otherwise one is too easily prone to using the other for pleasure. The gift of self in making love must be total, embracing the other person entirely, for the rest of their lives (as we see only in a loving marriage) — rather than rejecting that part of the person most made for the act of making love, the person's fertility, which is tantamount to the rejection of the person.

D. Challenge #3: An increased effeminacy in our culture

- 1) Effeminacy is not the same thing as femininity.
 - a) Femininity describes genuinely womanly traits in a woman. Femininity in itself is a full development of the female personality. Women can be feminine without being effeminate.
 - b) Effeminacy is a perversion of femininity.
 - c) Effeminacy comes from the Latin word "mollitia," which literally means softness.
 - i) It involves a general passivity in life as well as a lack of perseverance, especially before struggles and difficulties.
 - ii) St. Thomas Aquinas includes effeminacy under the vices opposed to perseverance. He says that it can be caused either by custom, when a man becomes so accustomed to enjoying pleasures that it makes it much more difficult for him to endure their absence; or by natural disposition, when a man is less persevering because of a frailty in temperament.
- 2) Our culture, especially since the onset of the era of so-called "political correctness" a little over a decade ago, has become much more effeminate.
 - a) Authentically-masculine virtues, like those of soldiers, are often considered vices or at least weaknesses today.

- b) Masculine culture has been attacked — as by definition discriminatory and demeaning of women. “Smashing the patriarchy” has led to a diminution of the appreciation of masculinity.
 - c) The discipline of children has become far more effeminate and this has had a particular impact on boys.
 - d) Our educational systems have become far less demanding, far softer, in order to make room for those who find genuine achievement difficult. We have become in certain segments of society more concerned with self-esteem than results. Competition has become in certain circles a pejorative term. Sports now stress “everybody plays” philosophies rather than winning. Winning is not everything, but striving to win is important, because if it doesn’t matter whether one wins or loses, why have goals, why strive?
 - e) Genuine “tough-love” is rarer today. The younger generation of parents and teachers seems more prone to wanting to have children like them than to teach, train and discipline them, even at the risk of the children’s displeasure.
- 3) The pro-homosexuality movement has promoted this effeminacy in our culture.
- a) While homosexuality and effeminacy are distinct, they are very often found together in individuals and in the larger pro-homosexuality movement.
 - b) The logic that attempts to justify homosexual activity is the antithesis of the theological andrology I’ve been trying to sketch here. The homosexual model deforms men, because it makes them consumers of others rather than truly responsible lovers, givers of themselves.
 - i) Homosexual activity is based on a principle of “harmonious egoisms,” to take a term from Karol Wojtyła’s *Love & Responsibility*.
 - ii) Pro-homosexuality journals like the *Journal of Homosexuality* as well as my own anecdotal experience in conversations with homosexual men, have shown that, for what seems to be most homosexual men, sexuality is looked at as a consensual, mutual utilitarianism.
 - iii) This consensual, mutual using of another for sexual pleasure is the opposite of love, because using someone, as Wojtyła says in *Love and Responsibility*, is the opposing of loving someone and will, sooner or later, corrode the love that may authentically exist between two people of the same sex.
 - iv) Rather than increasing and nourishing love between two people (literally, making love) who give themselves to each other and receive the other’s self gift within the context of a public commitment that will protect the fragile gift of that mutual self-donation, homosexual sexual activity is geared toward the mutual pleasure each may derive or give.
 - v) The homosexual model of sexual activity — harmonious egoisms and mutual utilitarianism — is found to some degree, *mutatis mutandis*, in premarital sexual activity, extramarital sexual activity and contraceptive sex within marriage, all of which impact a man’s becoming truly masculine, giving of himself in love and assuming responsibility for others in love.

IV. The Good News for a recovery of authentic masculinity in our modern societies

The above foray into the contemporary challenges to the formation of authentic masculinity and Christian men in our societies is not the only factor in the cultural and ecclesial equation. There are also several signs of hope. During this World Youth Day, in which Pope John Paul II, plays such a large role, I’d like to mention three aspects of the Good News that could lead to a renewal of true masculinity:

A. We’re on to the problem

- 1) The fact that we’ve properly diagnosed the problem of the deficient masculine formation in our culture is a large step forward. That allows us to start working toward a solution.
- 2) Recent organizations and movements (e.g., Promise Keepers, The Million Man March) have been reaching out in a particular way to men, to help them live up to their vocation to be responsible lovers in giving of themselves to others.

B. The writings of Pope John Paul II

- 1) These have given a deep philosophical and theological foundation for man’s authentic vocation.
- 2) His catecheses on the Theology of the Body brings man’s vocation to love back to Adam and then forward to the New Adam, Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church, who loved His Bride enough to lay down his life for her. It is a very solid, rich and deep foundation to give orientation to work in this field.
- 3) His document *Redemptoris Custos* focuses on the vocation of St. Joseph as guardian of the Redeemer and sets him forth as an example to all men. A must read.
- 4) His many writings on the Family, especially *Familiaris Consortio* and *the Letter to Families*, give concrete direction to men in living out their vocation as responsible, loving husbands and fathers.

C. The personal example of Pope John Paul II

- 1) Few would question the heroic and authentically masculine example of Karol Wojtyla.
- 2) He learned how to be a man much from his father, whom he would see quietly on his knees praying to the Lord at all times of the day. To the younger Karol Wojtyla, St. Joseph had the older Wojtyla's face.
- 3) He learned authentic responsibility throughout his whole life:
 - a) As a young man, meeting with the Rhapsodic theater when being caught meant possible deportation to a concentration camp;
 - b) learning what proper battles to fight during the Nazi occupation and the Communist regime in Poland;
 - c) his own example as Pope, in his perseverance after the assassination attempt, to his bold confrontation of dictators in Poland and South America, to his stamina in keeping his 18-hour days over the two-and-a-half decades of his papacy.
 - d) His coming down the steps from his airplane upon his arrival in Toronto showed yet again his courage;
 - e) his statement that he would not retire because just as Christ never came down from his Cross, neither would he forsake his own, shows that he's willing to continue not because of stubbornness but because of love and responsibility for the mission entrusted to him by God.

V. Conclusion

- A. The recovery of authentic masculinity in our culture is crucial and urgent and must be accompanied by a genuine appreciation for authentic femininity, which we have not discussed here.
- B. Since God created man in the image of God, male and female, and since the communion of persons in love between male and female is meant to be an image of the Triune God, who is an eternal Communion of Persons in love, for society and for persons to learn how to love, to become fully human and to become more and more like God, we must have real men and real women who know how to complement and love each other. When real men and real women learn to love each other fully, consistent with their original differentiation, an upward spiral of love develops, love is shown, and the whole world gets a glimpse of God who is love. And how urgently our world needs to see Him!