



TOUCHSTONE

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Welcome to the new print version of *Touchstone*.

After an absence of several years NFPC is publishing *Touchstone* in a print version.

This first edition contains two essays developed from presentations at NFPC's Convocation in Louisville, Kentucky last April. The theme of the convocation was "Father, Brother, Son: The Priest in the Family of God."

Father Lou Cameli, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago and the Archbishop's delegate for Formation and Mission writes on, "Who Am I Now- Father, Son, Brother-Making Sense of Priests' Complex Web of Relationships

to Bishops, People, and Each Other."

Mr. Joe Ollier, coordinator of Youth Ministry at Ascension Parish in Kettering, Ohio, reflects on "Spiritual Fatherhood and the Ordained Priesthood." Because of the length of his presentation, we've divided it into two parts. Part two will be in the next edition of *Touchstone*.

Why the change and why now? Although we've been publishing the weekly e-letter, NFPC *This Week* for over twelve years and technology has become the way to connect in the world, the e-letter format does not serve all priests well. Over the years we've been told by priest-representatives, through NFPC's Council of Consultors and Board of Directors, that many priests do not have access to or desire the Internet. Many priests want to receive something in hand. NFPC accedes to this desire. Our plan now is to publish *Touchstone* in print form several times a year. It will be expanded as needed and as resources exist.

Finally and most importantly, I want to remind all priests of the NFPC's upcoming Convocation next spring. The assembly will take place from April 18-21, 2016 at the Indianapolis Marriott East Hotel, 7202 E. 21st St., Indianapolis, Indiana 46219. Please mark this on your calendar. We will have more information as it becomes available on our web site – www.nfpc.org - in NFPC *This Week*, and in the next edition of *Touchstone*.

Your brother, in Christ,

Fr. Tony Cutcher, President

NFPC Mission

The National Federation of Priests' Councils serves the communion, brotherhood and solidarity of bishops, presbyterates and priests.

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Who Am I Now? Father, Son, Brother— Making Sense of Priests' Complex Web of Relationships to Bishops, People, and Each Other

Fr. Louis J. Cameli

From the Vatican II on, Church documents have many references to priests in the family language of father- son- brother. So, for example, priests are said to be sons in relationship to their bishop but also brothers with him. Priests are to be fathers to their people but also brothers as well. Certainly, priests are to be brothers to one another in a given presbyterate.



Given those references, some questions easily arise. Who exactly are we as priests at any given moment? Do these family titles have any special significance? Do they help us understand who we are and what our purpose is? Can these titles—father, son, brother—be misunderstood and lead to difficulties? These are some of the questions that I would like to take up in this presentation.

The Importance of Family Titles Applied to Priests

The family language of father-son-brother gives expression to the multiple and complex levels of priestly existence: who we are (identity), what we do (ministry), for what purpose (mission). References in the documents of the Second Vatican Council already tell us, in a general way, that using the family language of father-son-brother captures important dimensions of priestly mission and ministry. There is, however, a very specific determination in this usage. It is this: being a priest is a relational reality. In other words, we are constituted as priests in our existence and in our ministry and in our mission by relationships.

At first, the relational underpinnings of priesthood may seem unexceptional, even commonplace. That, however, is not at all true. From the time of the Council of Trent until the Second Vatican Council, the distinctive markers of priests rested in their special *powers* to consecrate the elements of bread and wine and to forgive sins and, secondly, the distinctive *jurisdiction* they exercised in the Church. With the Second Vatican Council, relationships become paramount. In the first place, of course, this means relationship to Jesus Christ. Priests are empowered to act in the name and person of Jesus Christ head and shepherd of the Church. The relational dimension continues in the Church. Their very ordination is an action that situates priests in a relationship to their bishop and other priests. They are, at ordination, incorporated into the presbyteral order. Finally, they are in an essential relationship with all the baptized, that is, in a mutually ordered relationship. *Lumen gentium* says: “Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ.” (n. 10) In simpler language, in the Church it makes no sense to have priests without people or people without priests.

Cautions

The language of family applied to priests has validity and truth. At the same time, we need to exercise some caution in our use of this language. Like so much religious language, priest as father-son-brother has a metaphorical quality. A literal application of this language can easily misrepresent the truth contained within it. So, for example, in a religious context “father” and “mother” have historically, in particular circumstances, been used to dominate and even exploit others and not to serve them. This language has created and underwritten environments that have been paternalistic, maternalistic, and infantilizing. Even the seemingly more inviting language of “brothers” and “sisters” has its own downside. The fraternal sense of relationships within the community of faith (and ministry) can cloak an unreal idealization of relationships with sometimes crushing consequences. The story of Cain and Abel is cautionary in this regard, as are the extensive studies of mimetic rivalry of René Girard.

In addition to these cautions about the misuse of family language applied to priests, we also need to consider how Jesus realigned family relationships in his teaching and practice. We find a key text in Mark’s gospel:

“Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, ‘Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for me.’ And he replied, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.’” Mark 3:31-35

Jesus highlights an entirely new set of relationships in the eschatological family of God, relationships not based on blood and kinship but on doing the will of God. And, at the center of this new family of God, is Jesus himself.

With these cautions and qualifications in mind, we can explore the implications and practical consequences of identifying priests as fathers-sons-brothers in the Church and in the family of God.

Implications And Practical Consequences

1. The priority of relationship over function.

Using and applying the language of family relationships to priests and bishops (father-son-brother) expresses the priority of relationship over function. In any family, there are necessary “functional aspects,” such as working to provide food and shelter, identifying a regular routine of family life, and assigning household tasks and responsibilities. Still, all those functions do not define the family. In fact, they are instrumental in serving the relationships and the bonds among family members. The goal and essence of family life is a set of flourishing relationships. This priority of relationship over function also helps us to understand the nature of ministry in the Church.

The sense of family—and our own identification with the language of father-son-brother—helps us to avoid succumbing to a business model of church life and ministry. Of course, we would never blatantly surrender to a business model with its emphasis on products, market share, and profits. Subtly and sometimes not so subtly, however, the functional business mind-set can insinuate itself in parish ministry.

Ultimately, our roots are in the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17. The Second Vatican Council took that prayer and in a remarkable way helped us to understand the relational and, indeed, Trinitarian scope of our life:

“...the Lord Jesus, when praying to the Father ‘that they may all be one...even as we are one’ (John 17:21-22), has opened up new horizons closed to human reason by implying that there is a certain parallel between the union existing among the divine persons and the union of the sons [and daughters] of God in truth and love.” (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 24)

2. In a family, we are “humanized.”

Participation in family life, including the family of God, humanizes us. The typical daily challenges that we face in family life, when we hear “Are you crazy? Don’t you see? What does *that* mean?”—all these challenges batter our defense mechanisms and make us a bit more human, more vulnerable, and more in tune with reality. And short of intensive and extensive psychotherapy, this family way is the only to get beyond intellectualization, denial, and projection—all of which keep us distant and disconnected. Ideally, family and the family that is Church provide the safe place where we can lower our defenses.

3. In a family, we are formed as disciples.

As I collated surveys for the upcoming synod, I learned once again how family forms disciples. Family, people constantly affirmed, is the first place to learn how to love and be loved. It is a school of self-giving. And that captures the heart of following Jesus, who gave himself for us that we might live. If priests live out their family relationships in the Church as father-son-brother, they will certainly grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.

4. In a family, we are formed for conflict.

It may seem strange to speak of formation for conflict, but there is an important truth here. Anyone who has lived in a family knows the inevitability of conflict in different forms. Thomas Oden in his book *Game-Free: A Guide to the Meaning of Intimacy* suggests that conflict capability is a requisite for a truly intimate relationship. If people cannot be in conflict (and emerge from it still together), they cannot experience genuine intimacy. Family life, when it works well, enables us to engage in struggles that we have with each other without ripping us apart from each other, because there is always a secure base of belonging. This fits a pattern evident in the New Testament. Look at Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians or Matthew’s Gospel chapters 16-18. Although conflicts in the Church seem to take us by surprise, they are inevitable in a family understanding of church and a community that has not yet arrived at its pilgrim destination. Priest-family members of this church community can learn how to manage conflict but also to struggle and help people to move toward reconciled relationships.

5. In a family, we learn flexibility of spirit and how to shift roles.

Family life, whether lived in an ordinary family or in the church family of God, inevitably entails members shifting roles, sometimes in dramatic ways. For example, parents care for children. There comes a time, however, when children care for parents. We assume different roles. That requires a certain flexibility of spirit and willingness to change. So, too, priests who are father-son-brother need that same flexibility of spirit.

CONCLUSION

The two synods on the family have focused our attention on family life and relationships in an unprecedented way. As priests, we need to take up this reflection and consider our own place in the Church as the family of God. This may provide a key for discerning our ministry and lives, for eliminating vestiges of clericalism, for engaging in healthy pastoral intimacy with our people, and for being more effective and authentic in our service.

Fr. Louis J. Cameli, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, gave a keynote presentation at the NFPC April 2015 Convocation in Louisville, Kentucky. This essay is based on his address. Fr. Cameli is the Archbishop's delegate for Formation and Mission. He received NFPC's Touchstone award at the Convocation.



Spiritual Fatherhood and Ordained Priesthood - Part I

Joe Ollier

When we boil all of it down, I think Spiritual Fatherhood comes down to two things: 1) Taking care of yourselves, and 2) Taking care of us.

In 2002 Sociologist Nicholas Townsend published the results of a study on fatherhood called *The Package Deal* (Temple University Press, 2002), which examined how dads experience and understand fatherhood. What he discovered is that for most men, marriage is the linchpin for their roles as fathers. The marriage relationship is so important that they really can't even envision fatherhood apart from it. It's one of the reasons fathers tend to drift out of the lives of their children if they have those children out of wedlock or even after divorce – being a father and being a husband are so intimately connected that men don't function well as fathers when they become estranged from their wives. What this means for those of us who are dads is that the best thing we do for our children is love their mother - our wives.

Townsend suggests that this link between fatherhood and marriage has something to do with the way men are wired, and so I would argue that it has implications for both laymen and clerics. And so if you are to be spiritual fathers to the people in your parishes and schools, etc... then it is imperative that you love our Mother - the Church - and that you work hard to maintain that relationship with her.

Take Care of Yourselves

It's so easy for us married couples to neglect our own relationship while we are busy raising kids, but if we let the day to day trials of carpools and juggled schedules consume us, we drift apart. How many marriages have you seen that break up after the kids are gone because the husband and wife have neglected their own relationship and grown apart over the years? My wife and I need to set aside time with each other. We need to remember why we fell in love in the first place. It's the reason we have season tickets to college basketball games and why we take ballroom dance classes together – if we didn't schedule those times, they probably wouldn't happen.

I think the same is true for you as priests. It is so easy to get wrapped up in the day to day trials of ministry that it may

be easy to drift away from your bride and remember why you fell in love with the church in the first place. So as one of your spiritual children, I urge you to take some time alone with my Mother, the Church. Date her. Court her. Pay attention to your prayer life, go on regular retreats, spend time in Adoration, and every once in a while just sit in the pew and remember what it was like to long for Holy Orders.

Taking care of your relationship with the church is not just about tending to spiritual matters, however. The better married men take care of their bodies and minds, the better they can take care of their families, and vice versa. The same is true for you. And so I encourage you to take care of your body and your mind. Exercise both of them. Have a hobby. Take your vacations.

We lay people understand that you spend your lives in service of others, and that your time to refuel and recharge is important. And we also know the damage that can be done when you're stretched too thin, or when you neglect your spiritual and emotional health, or by loneliness. You think we don't know when Father has a drinking problem? We do. You think you're hiding your pain from us? You're not. Just as we can often tell when a marriage is in trouble, we can also see when you are in trouble. The best advertisement for the priesthood is joyful priests, guys who love their vocation. We know you can't be that kind of priest if you don't take some time for yourself – body, mind, and soul. So please, for our sake, take care of yourself.

I also encourage you to take care of each other. If your individual relationships with the church matter, how much more does your collective relationship mean? One of the most important things you can do to pay attention to your bride the church is to pay attention to the other guys in that same relationship. Your individual relationships with the church are important, but you are not simply individual priests. You are a body of priests. Each of you brings your own unique set of gifts and talents to the community of priests, and each of you is necessary.

We must avoid the factionalism, which causes tension between younger priests and older priests, or between those who might be labeled "traditional" and "liberal." We are one body, and just as Paul says in Corinthians, none of us can say we are not part of the body. Nor can we say that others of us are not part of the body. A church that has room for Pax Christi and Regnum Christi, Augustine and Dorothy Day, St. Faustina and Thomas Merton, Pope Pius and Pope Francis certainly has room for all of you. There's no one way to be Catholic, and there's no one way to be a priest. The church is richer and more beautiful for all the diversity it contains. And so we lay people need you to take care of yourselves as a body of priests. Cherish and call forth the wide variety of charisms and gifts among you, so that you can cherish and call forth that same variety in us. As Proverbs 27:17 says, "as iron sharpens iron, so man sharpens his fellow man." Sharpen each other. Make each other stronger. Love each other. And by doing so, you'll make the whole Church stronger.

Take Care of Us

Townsend's study also found that fatherhood itself is really defined by four main aspects: Provision, Emotional Closeness, Protection, and Endowment. And just as marriage has implications in terms of Fatherhood for both lay people and priests, so do these four aspects of Fatherhood itself.

Provision

Townsend defines Provision as the ability of a father to meet the material needs of his family. Obviously, that sort of provision is not something we're asking of you. So how does Provision relate to the spiritual fatherhood of the priest? I think that for you, fatherhood means putting the spiritual roof over our heads and food on the table – it means providing the Sacraments as only an ordained person can do.

But beyond meeting basic needs, Townsend found that there are other things good dads want to provide their families, namely Emotional Closeness, Protection, and Endowment. And I think spiritual fatherhood also involves those same aspects.

Emotional Closeness

Townsend's study revealed that almost universally, people desire emotional closeness with their fathers, and that the degree to which people feel emotionally close to their fathers has profound effects. The same is true with our spiritual fathers.



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The reality for us lay people is that the vast majority of us will only know a very few priests, usually the men who are our pastors or associates. Some folks in the pews will be able to count on one hand the number of priests they'll know in their whole lifetime. We can take St. Paul quite literally when he says in 1 Corinthians, "Even if you should have countless guides to Christ, yet you do not have many fathers," (1 Cor 4:15). Given that reality, the impact of an individual priest is pretty amazing. Our parish will have a new pastor this summer, and since he was announced, more than a few older folks have said something along the lines of, "Well I guess now I know who will be presiding at my funeral." I think that's really powerful. You are there for some of the most important moments in our lives, yes, but small things matter too. You have no idea what your presence means in the school cafeteria or at Friday night football games. Pope Francis has talked about shepherds "having the smell of the sheep on them" and I think this is what he means – sometimes just being present is enough.

This doesn't mean you have to show up at everything. It does mean you are in the same boat as those of us laymen who are fathers, in that what you say with your words and deeds matters a lot to the people under your care. The difference is that you have a few thousand more people to care for.

To be continued.

Joe Ollier is coordinator of Youth Ministry at Ascension Parish in Kettering Ohio. He also is adjunct professor of Religious Studies at the University of Dayton. Joe gave a keynote presentation at the NFPC April 2015 Convocation in Louisville, Kentucky. This essay is based on his address.



SAVE THE DATE!

Please join us at the 48th Annual NFPC Convocation
April 18 – 21, 2016
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