

Introduction

- Overall purpose tonight is to lead into a series of conferences whose goal will be to consider particular challenges facing Catholic fathers. Tonight is to set the stage and consider what challenges face us.
 - At outset, will appear somewhat negative, I am agreed. However, we need to see something of the
- I'll begin with an anecdote from the book *Strong Mothers, Strong Sons*. (page 311) The author is conservative and has also written *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters*, which makes many good points. Indeed, there are many good observations in *Strong Mothers, Strong Sons*. However, in this particular story, she describes a situation where the mother had decided that her teenage son cannot go hunting with his father; unsurprisingly, the boy's attitude towards his mother is hostile. Eventually, she relents and lets him go. What is very revealing is that there is no mention whatsoever in the whole anecdote of the father's opinion, nor any suggestion that it mattered. Meeker in no way suggests that the woman was out of line by usurping what is, in fact, a prerogative of her husband.
- Why bring up this example? Because it highlights that the problem we face is not simply about numbers, statistics, or even material duties. Rather, it points towards a cultural vision—deeply embedded in society—that fathers are not essential in the home or in their children's lives. Even this good and well-meaning woman who has much good to say is touched by it. That vision shapes the wider culture, and it affects us all, contributing to a profound confusion and lack of confidence in fathers, even in our traditional circles. Almost all our day to day problems as fathers can be traced to this underlying vision.
- Thus, our task is firstly to confront the meaning of manhood and fatherhood. What are we called to be and how does a proper appreciation of it serve to guide us in our lives? This is not a light topic that can be easily grasped in one talk. However, it must serve as the basis of how we seek to resolve all the concrete manifestations of
 - Therefore, I am going to challenge you to commit to the effort to think
 - Do not assume there is nothing to learn
 - I am going to address particular topics of very real practical importance for you and your families. For example, questions of modesty, technology, music, dating.
 - But I am not going to treat these topics in isolation or in the manner of “do this, don't do that”. We need to see the deep reasons behind what we are invited to do.
 - I am going to challenge you to rise above the mentality of “if it is not sinful, it is fine”. This is a justification of mediocrity and often an excuse to avoid the difficult task of thinking about what is and what is not worthy of a son of God and the Catholic home entrusted to his care.

- I am going to challenge you to be committed. persevere and to make time for these conferences, even when this or that topic does not seem as immediately interesting.

Origins of crisis

- To start, let us look briefly at some of the origin of this crisis.
- Firstly and foremost, attack on fatherhood & principle of authority
 - Ultimate target of attack is the Fatherhood of God. Ultimate conflict governing human history is that between God and the devil.
 - For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, [15](#) Of whom *all paternity* in heaven and earth is named, [16](#) That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened by his Spirit with might unto the inward man,
 - John 15, 18-20: If the world hate you, know ye, that it hath hated me before you [23](#) He that hateth me, hateth my Father also.
 - Thus, by driving God and Our Lord Jesus Christ out of public life, there is a necessary disappearance of true fatherhood.
 - Is not ours an age of mislived lives, of unmanned men? Why?...Because Jesus Christ has disappeared. Wherever the people are true Christians, there are men to be found in large numbers, but everywhere and always, if Christianity wilts, men wilt. Look closely, they are no longer men but shadows of men. Thus what do you hear on all sides today? The world is dwindling away, for lack of men; the nations are perishing for scarcity of men, for the rareness of men....I do believe: there are no men where there is no character; there is no character where there are no principles, doctrines, stands taken; there are no stands taken, no doctrines, no principles, where there is no religious faith and consequently no religion of society. Do what you will: only from God will you get men [Homily on Christmas, 1871]
 - Cf. St Pius X: Then again, to omit other motives, We were terrified beyond all else by the disastrous state of human society today. For who can fail to see that society is at the present time, more than in any past age, suffering from a terrible and deep-rooted malady which, developing every day and eating into its inmost being, is dragging it to destruction? You understand, Venerable Brethren, what this disease is -- apostasy from God, than which in truth nothing is more

- allied with ruin, according to the word of the Prophet: "For behold they that go far from Thee shall perish" (Ps. 1xxii., 17)
- At the same time, to destroy man's dependence on God, there is a deliberate effort to undermine the role of the father in the home.
 - Quote of Woodrow Wilson, in book *What is Progress*
 - I used to say, when I had to do with the administration of an educational institution [*Wilson was president of Princeton University from 1902 to 1910.—TGW*], that I should like to make the young gentlemen of the rising generation as unlike their fathers as possible.
 - Progress, of course, is to leave the past behind. What is the past if not one's forefathers?
 - Progress! Did you ever reflect that that word is almost a new one? No word comes more often or more naturally to the lips of modern man, as if the thing it stands for were almost synonymous with life itself, and yet men through many thousand years never talked or thought of progress. They thought in the other direction. Their stories of heroisms and glory were tales of the past. The ancestor wore the heavier armor and carried the larger spear. "There were giants in those days." Now all that has altered. We think of the future, not the past, as the more glorious time in comparison with which the present is nothing. Progress, development,—those are modern words. The modern idea is to leave the past and press onward to something new.
 - Modern politics as an institution is ultimately an attack on God and by extension paternal authority & God's providence. Man is abandoned by God and must look after himself.
 - Machiavelli's blasphemy
 - Only quote of NT is Magnificat to compare the way Our Lady speaks about God with the qualities of a tyrant.
 - Cite social contract theory
 - 1st Treatise is attack on Filmer's Pro Patriarcha
 - 2nd Treatise assails origin of government out of patriarchy.
 - Whether it be modern liberalism or atheistic communism, the thrust is to declare independence from God and to downplay all that represents him. The rule of the masses/will of the people/the majority vote, all of these things destroy the essence of authority/hierarchy, the very foundation of the Church and Fatherhood
 - This leads to the undermining customs and laws that support man being the point of contact between the home and larger society
 - Can see this quite clearly in communism: Origin of family and private property, Engels: The situation changed with the patriarchal family, and even

more with the monogamian individual family. The administration of the household lost its public character. It was no longer the concern of society; it became a private service. The wife became the first domestic servant, pushed out of the participation in social production. . . . It will then be evident that the first premise for the emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry; and that this again demands that the quality possessed by the family of being the economic unit of society be abolished.

- But also in modern liberalism. Almost all recent changes of family law have effectively pursued the end of diminishing the authority of the father in the home
 - Voting
 - Property rights
 - Question of divorce & child support
 - No fault divorce in particular
 - Artificial contraception
 - Encouraging women getting involved in large numbers in modern workforce.
- The secret societies of the nineteenth century were very clear about their strategy. The *Permanent Instruction of the Alta Vendita* declared:
 - “Corrupt the young, and you will detach the heart from the Church. Corrupt the family, and you will undermine society.”
 - Notice—they did not speak only of politics or economics. They knew that the Christian family, with the father at its head, was the seedbed of faith and the bulwark of civilization. To corrupt the family is, by necessity, to corrupt fatherhood: to strip the man of his God-given role as protector, guide, and priest of the home.

Nature of crisis & challenges facing men

- Not enough to look within the walls of the home. The home is part of the larger society. To understand what is at issue in the home we have to consider the larger context of what is going on in society.
 - Two quotes from Willock, pages 60 & 61.
- What then are some of the major challenges facing men and fathers in our day?
 - *Abandonment of serious purpose & nobility of life*
 - This is firstly an attack on God by bringing everything down to the level of man.
 - Friedrich Nietzsche makes the same point that the Holy Father made, but he highlights the consequence of this rejection of God in the souls of men. What appears at first glance to enhance the dignity of man (denying anything above him) results in a terrible downgrading

of man. There is no longer anything superior to man by which man may measure himself, nothing to give meaning to life or to provide order and sense. All is permitted.

- The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. We have killed him ---you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning?"
- The consequence of the death of God for modern man is to make all things small and petty, even religion. Nietzsche names this petty spirit there will be "the last man." The last man asks, "*What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?*" and shrugs. The earth becomes small because he has made everything small. Like insects, his kind endures—but without spirit.
- Men will to give themselves to something greater than themselves. The modern world makes all things small, unimportant, and meaningless. This means nothing is worth sacrificing for.
 - Modern cosmology – universe is huge, random place where man means nothing.
 - Calvin – "I am significant" – screamed the dust speck
 - Modern science & technology
 - Evolution – man is a random product of change. Rather than being descended from God, our forefathers were literally beasts.
 - Technology now is aimed at conquering nature and replacing providence, not only eliminating scarcity (i.e., no chance of famine) but also any kind of discomfort (air conditioning). Also, to provide inconsequential pleasure (contraception, weight loss drugs), and to spare the trials of the end of life (euthanasia)
 - Transhumanism – mankind is fundamentally deficient and must be overcome; not by grace, but by technology.
 - Modern politics

- in many respects, reduced to economics as understood by making money, producing and consuming material goods. Most discussions on important topics like immigration framed in terms of workforce, etc.
 - since man is not destined for anything great, he too is measured in terms of economics. Human resources.
- Very little about way of life and traditions of a nation or people.
- Little to no room for noble and great-hearted action that is meaningful
- Large scale immigration to reshape people and to dilute their traditions. Any opposition to this is “far right”.
- modern culture and entertainment
 - There is a vulgarity about most ways in which we are invited to employ our leisure time
 - Ignoble music, Ignoble dress, ignoble cultural trends. All this emphasizes the conviction that man is meaningless and that we may as well cater to what is lowest in him.
- The last men claim they have discovered happiness. But their happiness is comfort, safety, and mediocrity. They avoid hardship, avoid suffering, avoid risk. They love only as a way to feel warm. They scorn ambition, wealth, poverty, leadership, and obedience alike—everything that demands sacrifice. They are content with shallow pleasures by day and by night, careful always to preserve their health.
- *Loss of sense of authority*
 - If life has no meaning or nobility, there is a loss of understanding of purpose & nobility of the one who guides us to it.
 - Loss therefore of understanding of what it means to command and govern
 - Dignity of men:
 - They have received a treasure which it is their duty and privilege to transmit. They are the guardians of a patrimony – it is this sense of patrimony that has effectively been eviscerated.
 - They are also meant to do things that matter
 - Children are meant to measure up to their fathers so as to become worthy of them. Cf. Theoden when he dies in Lord of the Rings: I am about to join my fathers, in whose mighty company I am no longer ashamed to stand.
 - Men represent the patrimony; if the heritage is corrupt or is meant to be overcome and rejected, then men have nothing to give.
 - This spirit deeply affects man & vitiates his virility.
 - Makes him feel deeply a certain uselessness and lack of worth.

of our fathers. 27 And Mathathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: Every one that hath zeal for the law, and maintaineth the testament, let him follow me. 28 So he, and his sons fled into the mountains, and left all that they had in the city.

- What underlies such a spirit? What are the rough outlines of a good father?
 - We may say provisionally that a true father is the head of his home, a link between his home and his ancestors and the wider society.
 - Closest to heaven:
 - Closest to God & thus fount of authority
 - Source of spirit of Faith (truth of God)
 - Source of spirit of nobility (excellence of God)
 - Sets standards and tone firstly for himself and then by extension for those who depend upon him)
 - Sets standard of goodness by handing on the treasures he has received.
 - Seat of all the senses:
 - One who possesses true vision
 - In perspective of eternity, he perceives order to the world in which his wife and the children she gives Him must live and act and helps them to see it.
 - Further, he comprehends the common good, both of the family and of the wider
 - One who listens and receives input of all members of family as well as information from wider world and *processes* it.
 - Requires attention
 - Requires spirit of reflection and consideration
 - Therefore, a friend of silence and fruitful solitude with his own thoughts
 - Mover of the whole body:
 - He is the one who gives direction to the family.
 - This is a fruit of his vision of God and the order of the world
 - He is at peace with the fact that he is responsible for truly leading and making decisions.
 - He has confidence to ask of his wife to help him pursue his work
 - He knows he is the primary educator of his children and acts accordingly.
- Tonight we have only set the stage. We have seen that the crisis of manhood and fatherhood is not simply a matter of statistics, but of vision—of how the world views men, and of how we view ourselves. We have glimpsed how stress, trial, and sacrifice are not enemies, but the very forge where true manhood and even sainthood are formed. Yet this is only the

beginning. In the weeks ahead, we will go deeper—into the practical remedies, the habits of mind and heart, the supernatural helps, and the bonds of brotherhood that can restore men to their rightful place as protectors, leaders, and fathers. Tonight sets the tone; what follows will be the work of building.

- Challenge:
 - spiritual reading – recommendation
 - How to Pray