

Where's Papa? What's Masculinity?

A short primer on the men's movement from a man who grew up in an Adventist family with a father who used to be strict and controlling.

by Steve Daily

RECENTLY, PERHAPS FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, two of the top 10 books on the *New York Times* best-seller list focused on the subject of masculinity (*Iron John* and *Fire in the Belly*).¹ These best-sellers are just two of the numerous works that have already been published in the 1990s dealing with male identity or manhood.² Most of these books are experiential works that have grown out of the authors' anger, frustration, or struggle to redefine masculine identity in an age of gender role revolution.

A few years ago I heard Hans Kung declare in a lecture at Claremont that "the change in sexual roles which has occurred in the western world during the last two decades has

created the most profound social revolution in all of civilized history."³ Initially, such a statement seemed almost shocking to me. But the more I reflected on it, the more credible his claim became. The sexual role revolution of the '60s, '70s, and '80s has dramatically affected all of our lives and to a great degree has contributed to the reshaping of Western culture.

The problem with this "sexual role revolution" for many men, however, is that they have felt defined by the movement, rather than feeling that they've had any defining influence on the movement. To be more accurate, they have felt mislabeled, confused, or even attacked by the new definitions of sexual roles. In the words of Sam Keen,

Ask most any man "How does it feel to be a man these days? Do you feel manhood is honored, respected, celebrated?" Those who pause long enough to consider their gut feelings will likely tell you they feel blamed, demeaned and attacked. But their reactions may be pretty vague. Many men feel as if they are involved in

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a night battle in a jungle against an unseen foe. Voices from the surrounding darkness shout hostile challenges: "Men are too aggressive, too soft, too insensitive, too macho, too obsessed with sex, too detached to care, too busy, too rational, too lost to lead, too dead to feel." Exactly what we are supposed to become is not clear. . . . At no time in recent history have there been so many restless, questioning men.⁴

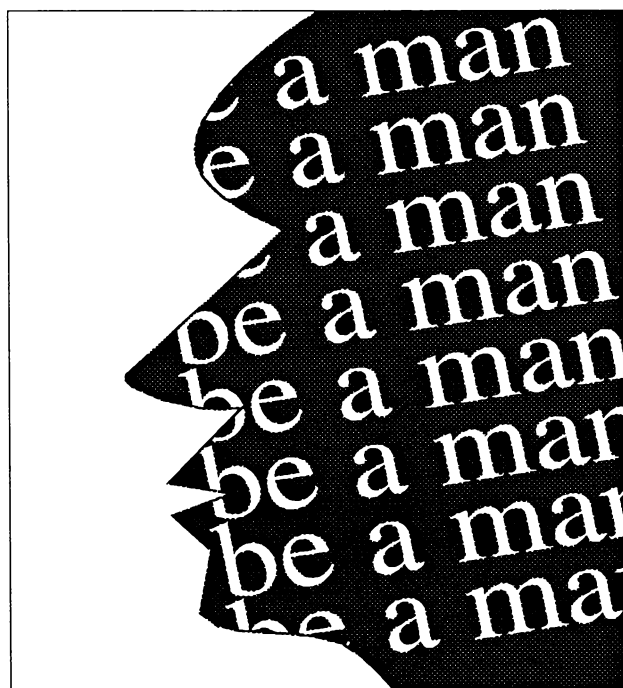
As I reflect from my own experience on this statement, and what it has meant to try to define a healthy, masculine identity growing up during the last three decades, I can concur with Keen's observation. These are confusing times for those who want to know what society expects of a man. I grew up in an Adventist home that modeled very traditional male and female sex roles. My parents were only 20 when I was born as the first of three boys. All three of us were into our teens before my mother started working full time outside the home, and there was no question about who was in charge or who called the shots in the family. My father was clearly the dominant figure. He was viewed with fear and respect and seemed to personify adjectives such as *strong*, *strict*, *controlling*, *forceful*, *disciplined*, and *authoritarian*.

My father taught me to be a man. He taught me that boys were tough, that they didn't cry. We all learned how to control and suppress our emotions. Above all I learned how to sublimate my competitive drive and aggression into a passion for sports. In fact, competitive sports, more than any other factor in my childhood and early adolescence, helped to shape a rather macho mentality toward masculinity and women.

In this regard, I will never forget the first year I played tackle football as a teenager. The coaching staff constantly attempted to motivate us through an extravagant use of profanity coupled with insults that denigrated and demeaned the opposite sex. Their outbursts could be heard at every practice: "Daily, you

tackle like a G__d__ woman! What's wrong with you? Are you some kind of a f__ssy? Now get your a__ in gear and hit 'em like you mean it and not like some d__ little girl!" Thankfully, as I grew out of sports and acquired a real intellectual curiosity and desire for education, such expressions of macho manhood were seen as laughable examples of sexism and immaturity.

I became a firm believer in the equality of the sexes, but as a young Adventist I still wasn't prepared for what I would encounter in a Claremont doctoral program at the height of the feminist movement. This experience introduced me to a world view that presupposed an aversion for traditional sex roles. My coursework included generous assignments from readings and books by authors such as Mary Daly, Rosemary Ruether, Naomi Goldenberg, and Anne Wilson Schaefer. These radical feminists argued that Christendom has "raped, twisted, tortured and dismembered" the "female spirit"⁵; that sexism is the "root sin" and "original sin"⁶; that the truth of feminism



must bring an end to the lie of God and traditional religion⁷; and that our society is on an addictive self-destructive course created by a "white male system," which must be replaced by an "emerging female system."⁸

In the late '70s and early '80s the discipline of theology was inundated with these kinds of feminist works. If you were a white male it was a "hazardous" time⁹ to be attending most seminaries or graduate schools. The '80s proved to be a decade where "male bashing" became the rage in a number of best-selling pop psychology books. Best-sellers such as *Men Who Hate Women and the Women Who Love Them*, *Smart Women/Foolish Choices*, and *Women Who Love Too Much* are just a few examples of popular works that presented men as "villains" who were generally "immature, self-centered and impossible" when it came to building healthy relationships.¹⁰

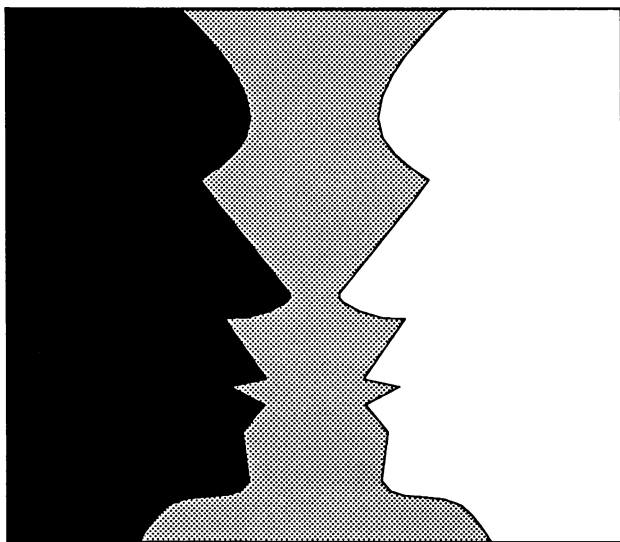
However, in the '90s men seem to be breaking out of their reactive and defensive tendencies to either ignore the sexual role revolution or to be defined by it. Many works are calling men to redefine their present by rediscovering their past. Robert Bly has become a present day "Iron John," or modern mentor, for disoriented males of the '90s. He explores the ancient stories and visions of

manhood, ranging from Grimm's Fairy Tales to Homer's *Odyssey*, in an effort to provide a new vision of manhood that can be created out of such works of antiquity. Bly argues that women are not to blame for the chaos that characterizes manhood today. We cannot pull a Freudian cop-out and blame Mother for the boy's problems. Rather, the responsibility lies with men, and particularly the older generation of men, to pass on a vision of male identity to those who would be more than boys.

Again as I reflect on my own experience as a male church member, Adventism has not traditionally provided a strong masculine identity for its men, and it has been even more unsuccessful at attracting male worshipers into its congregations than Christian denominations in general. As Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart have observed, Adventism is the largest Christian denomination to have been founded by a woman. Its ratio of two female members for every male reflects a growing disassociation of men from the church.

In contrast to other 19th-century movements such as Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists have chosen to avoid a confrontational relationship with the state or culture at large, opting instead for the "traditionally feminine" role of social subordination. Adventists have made their mark on society primarily as healers and nurturers and have always valued music over sports or athletics.¹¹ Yet those men who do occupy the exclusively male-dominated positions of leadership in the church have ironically imposed a hierarchical, domineering, and authoritarian style of decision-making on church members—a form of decision-making that empowers the few (who claim to be servant-leaders), while disenfranchising the many (males and females alike).¹²

I have been amazed to see that even the most soft-spoken Adventist liberals are not immune to such "power transformations." Unlike Bly, this older generation of Adventist



men has not provided a vision that inspires their younger brothers to develop a dynamic redefinition of manhood. These so-called leaders have been too preoccupied with preserving their own positions of power to worry about providing healthy models of male or egalitarian leadership.

Other authors who have contributed to the process of redefining masculinity in the '90s include Robert Weiss. His *Staying the Course*¹³ carefully researched the lives of 80 men who have achieved unusual success in both their careers and families. His goal is to provide a model of what "successful manhood" looks like by the standards currently applied in our society. The problem with such a study is that it defines male success in the context of our present culture. Success, as defined by Weiss, involved working very hard and long hours, often getting little sleep, bearing the traditional stresses of provider, handling the intense pressures of being excellent at work and still adequate as a husband and father, and ultimately finding male identity and self-validation through one's occupational or professional acceptance.¹⁴

Weiss's book particularly made me think, for I have bought into the male success syndrome in the context of Adventism. I entered the ministry with a burning desire to change the church, to make it more "user friendly" for the younger generation. I worked

and studied hard, earning two master's and two doctoral degrees. I learned how to get by on four to five hours of sleep a night for months at a time in an attempt to balance the responsibilities of a university chaplain, teacher, student, husband, and father of young children. But I have learned that the system does not really welcome people who try to change it, regardless of their qualifications, and that to base one's male identity or self-validation on the professional goal of changing the church is ultimately to lose one's identity.

I have also been influenced by Aaron Kipnis's *Knights Without Armor*,¹⁵ which calls for a new male psychology and "radical masculinity" that is not primarily defined by the "heroic masculinity" of the past or the "feminized masculinity" of the present. Rather, he proposes a new and future "authentic masculinity" which will integrate the best definitions of masculinity from

both of these traditions. This new masculinity would retain such physical characteristics as "generative, vigilant, flexible, and strong," but reject such physical traits as "domineering, coercive, pliant, or submissive." It would retain qualities such as "assertiveness, nurturing, humor, and deep feeling," but reject "dependence, passivity, repression, and aggression."

Such a vision of authentic manhood is attractive, but it is not being modeled or generated in Adventism. As usual, we are about 10 years behind the mainline culture. We have not yet embraced an egalitarian

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ethic; we are still trying to figure out how to ordain women. So the denomination is probably a decade away from facing up to the fact that our churches do not generally attract what Kipnis calls “authentic, fulfilled men.”

In *The Grown Up Man*, John Friel also makes some important contributions to a redefinition of manhood in the context of family systems, addiction, and recovery.¹⁶ He identifies the “betrayed male syndrome” as a family system that is over-mothered and under-fathered and calls both men and women

together to bring healing and recovery to the dysfunctional system that has created both male and female brokenness. Here again, there is relevance for the Adventist male, for many of us, like myself, were partially raised by Mother Ellen (and her red books). We can identify with being over-mothered for our male identity and Christian identity was infallibly defined by

a “perfect” woman. As any early teen, I can still remember the horrendous fears I struggled with when I first read “Sister White’s” warnings about masturbation in *Messages to Young People*. Her words on competition and sports were also quoted to me by teachers on more than one occasion. Yet even though I intuitively knew that her authority was being overstated, there was never any father figure in the church who could “hold a candle” to her power.

Finally, from a Christian and/or theological/spiritual perspective, there are four more

new books on manhood which I have also found helpful in contributing to a redefinition of masculinity in the 1990s: From the conservative side of the Christian spectrum, Edwin Cole’s *On Becoming a Real Man*¹⁷ provides a powerful picture of the manhood of Jesus as a model for Christian men today. Cole has been giving seminars to men for more than a decade now.¹⁸ He is one of the true pioneers in the modern men’s movement, and his insights have literally transformed the lives of thousands of men to which he has ministered.

Christ models a masculinity that never intimidates and is never intimidated: masculinity that is not afraid to weep with the hurting and oppressed, and is willing to confront every bastion of injustice. Jesus’ is the ultimate man whose faith is so real that he doesn’t fight back in the face of the greatest personal unfairness.

In a world where children are shaped and nurtured almost exclusively by female authority figures such as nurses, mothers, child-care professionals, Sunday/Sabbath school teachers, and elementary teachers (of which more than 90 percent are female), Cole calls men to rediscover their roles as fathers and priests of the home.

He calls the church in all its de-

nominal diversity to quit being a “narcissistic bride” and to focus on the Bridegroom. Christ models a masculinity that never intimidates and is never intimidated: masculinity that is not afraid to weep with the hurting and oppressed, is socially proactive and willing to confront every bastion of injustice. It is also a masculinity that takes prayer seriously. Jesus is the ultimate man who lives what he believes, whose faith is so real that he doesn’t fight back in the face of the greatest personal unfairness. In short, he is the personification of manhood.

One reason that males may not strongly identify with Adventism is that the church has failed to elevate Christ above all else. In practice, we have subordinated Jesus Christ to both Ellen White and the institutional church (as "God's Remnant"). This was recently illustrated at a Pacific Union Academy Leadership Conference, where student leaders from our various schools were asked to stand on an imaginary line to indicate how they viewed their relationship to God. The line stretched across the room and was numbered from one to 10, with one representing no commitment to God and 10 representing total commitment to him. The majority of the students stood in the five to seven area.

The surprise came with the question that followed. When the students were asked to stand on the same imaginary line with reference to their commitment to the Adventist Church, the overall scores for the group became significantly higher. In other words, these young people were more committed and loyal to the Adventist Church than they were to God. This finding is disturbing, but not surprising for those of us who have analyzed the Valuegenesis data in detail. This research clearly reveals that we are more successful at creating denominational loyalty in our young people than a Christ-centered understanding of gospel and grace.¹⁹

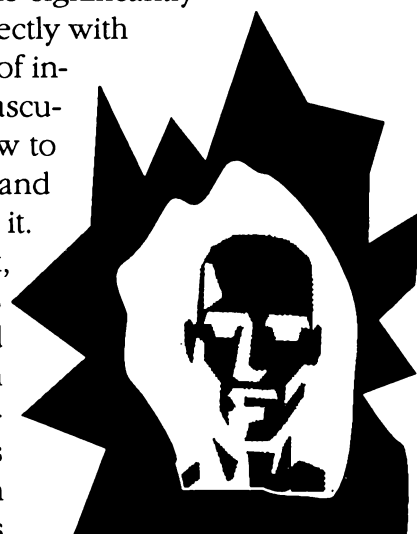
In my own Adventist experience, I was influenced most during my college and seminary years by a man who exalted and glorified Christ more than any other teacher. I've read at least 10 of his books and still sometimes listen to his class tapes. He was a man who constantly pointed people to Jesus not only as the perfect male, but also as the perfect human being. Yet this kind of Christ-centered teaching was ultimately rejected by the church at Glacier View. Even more important than male and female identity is identity in Christ.²⁰ Cole argues that "manhood and Christlikeness are

synonymous."²¹ If the church wants more men to darken its doors, it must call men to follow the radical Christ.

The church must also make some very practical efforts if it is to become more "male-friendly." Gordon Dalbey's *Healing the Masculine Soul* provides the most thoughtful insights from a Christian perspective. It is experiential and modern in its approach.²² Dalbey calls for a redefinition of masculinity that is church-based. He identifies reasons why many men do not attend church and offers practical suggestions about how the church can become more user friendly to men.

When you really stop to think about it, how many Adventist churches have ongoing ministries specifically designed to attract and involve men in the life of the church? The "feminization of American religion" is a process that began more than a century ago and continues to build momentum today.²³ Many times priorities in our congregations reinforce the "masculine myth" that religion is for women, children, wimpy men and old folks, but not for "real men." Our churches often have women's study groups, but not too many church-sponsored gym nights or recreational leagues.

Two other books on manhood that have influenced me significantly both deal directly with the problem of internalized masculine rage, how to identify it, and how to heal it. The first book, which has resonated deeply with my own experience, is Arterburn and Stoop's



*The Angry Man.*²⁴ It uncovers the anger and denial that is repressed inside so many men today. It reveals that Christian men are not immune to such anger and may actually be more vulnerable to it in some ways.²⁵ It links the increasing number of men who are angry in society today to the absenteeism of male models that has resulted largely from the sociological shift from rural to urban society over the past century. This cultural revolution has led to dual career marriages, and other sociological changes that have effected marital intimacy. As a result, men and women alike find themselves living with greater rage than ever before. And the male tendency to deny and repress such emotions compounds the internalization of such rage. The authors reveal that more males than ever before are giving up on marital intimacy in favor of addictive sexual outlets that are increasingly available in society today.²⁶

As a campus chaplain who has wedded, and later counseled, many couples over the past 12 years, I can attest to the fact that Adventist men are not immune to such problems. It seems that more and more Adventist males are struggling with the temptations of pornography and other forms of addictive sex. More than almost any group, we have been affected in the past few generations by a radical shift from rural to urban/professional living. Because we now educate a higher percentage of our young people, we are also more affected by dual-career marriages than the general population. Finally, our traditional views about sex have often served to heighten the tensions over what is sexually appropriate in marriage for couples who can find the time for intimacy.²⁷

Finally, Sam Keen's *Fire in the Belly* is the most controversial and confrontational of the spiritual works that offer a redefinition of masculinity. He argues that in contrast to the

cliches and common wisdom which tell us that it is a "man's world," the truth is that women hold a much greater psychic bondage over men than vice versa, and that indeed it is a "woman's world." Men can only survive and thrive in such a world when they learn to find peace, joy, and solitude apart from women. "We can't be comfortable in intimacy with women because we have never been comfortable in being distant from them."²⁸

According to Keen, to become a man one must first become a prodigal. We must separate from the world of women. Secondly, men must disown the rites of manhood, such as war, workaholism, and sexual addiction, which "impoverish and alienate" him. Thirdly, men must rediscover the truth that authentic manhood has always been defined by a dynamic vision of how men fit into the universe. Fourthly, in this process men must rediscover their spiritual souls and selves. Finally, after the first four steps are taken, men and women can together create a common vision for humanity.

Keen's book is fascinating and filled with power, but seems to assume that only men can truly redefine the nature of masculinity. The truth is that some of the best books I've read on masculine identity have been written by women.²⁹ All truth is God's truth. When we understand that God transcends human sexuality and that God's spirit transcends human sexuality in the transmission of truth, we will better understand the nature of gender. We will better understand that in Christ prejudices based on sex roles must be eliminated (Galatians 3:28) both inside and outside the Adventist Church. Yet even here, I recognize that my impatience with the church is not unrelated to anger I internalized as a child.

It is never clear to me what degree my extreme discomfort with autocratic and authoritarian methods in the church are justified, or are simply carry-over baggage from my

early struggle to establish an identity distinct from a domineering father. But this much I know: The church is in need of major changes if it is to meet both the male and female needs of its younger generation. The men's movement, from this Adventist's perspective, is not a "backlash against feminism," but an overdue attempt to redefine manhood in the wake of

the sexual role revolution.³⁰ If we can actively participate in it we may see the Adventist Church become both more "user friendly" and more authentically Christlike for young adult males. My hope and prayer is that the church can transform itself as thoroughly and effectively as my own strict, controlling, and authoritarian dad has changed.

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¹ Robert Bly, *Iron John* (New York: Addison Wesley Pub., 1990), and Sam Keen, *Fire in the Belly* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991).

² Some other recent books on men today include: John Friel, *The Grown Up Man* (Dearfield Beach, Fla.: Health Communications, Inc., 1990); Aaron Kipnis, *Knights Without Armor* (Los Angeles: Jeremy Tarcher, Inc., 1991); and Robert Weiss, *Staying the Course* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1991).

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⁴ Keen, p. 6.

⁵ Mary Daly, *Gyn Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 93.

⁶ Rosemary Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), p. 173 f.

⁷ Naomi Goldenberg, *The Changing of Gods* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), pp. 3-4.

⁸ Ann Wilson Schaef, *Women's Reality* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985); and *When Society Becomes an Addict* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 7f.

⁹ See Herb Goldberg, *The Hazards of Being Male* (New York: Signet Books, 1977). Another early work that redefined masculinity in the context of feminism was Joseph Pleck, *The Myth of Masculinity* (London: MIT Press, 1981).

¹⁰ Howard Halpern, "Ill-boding Male-Bashing Bonanza" (*Los Angeles Times* View Section, October 27, 1986). For a historical perspective on such tension between the sexes, see Gerald Schoenewolf, *Sexual Animosity Between Men and Women* (London: Jason Aaronson, Inc., 1989).

¹¹ Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), pp. 179-181.

¹² See Steve Daily, *The Irony of Adventism*, Claremont Doctoral Dissertation (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1985).

¹³ Weiss, p. ix f.

¹⁴ Weiss, p. xvi.

¹⁵ Kipnis, p. 99.

¹⁶ Friel, p. 13 f.

¹⁷ Edwin Cole, *On Becoming a Real Man* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1982).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Steve Daily, *Adventist Adolescents and Addiction*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1991).

²⁰ For an excellent work on identity in Christ see Neil Anderson, *Victory Over the Darkness* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1990).

²¹ Cole, p. 39.

²² Gordon Dalbey, *Healing the Masculine Soul* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1988).

²³ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977).

²⁴ Stephen Arterburn and David Stoop, *The Angry Man* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1992).

²⁵ Arterburn and Stoop, p. 71.

²⁶ See also Stephen Arterburn, *Addicted to Love* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Pub., 1991); Ralph Earle, *Lonely All the Time* (New York: Pocket Books, 1989); and Patrick Carnes, *Don't Call It Love* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990).

²⁷ Bull and Lockhart, p. 179-181.

²⁸ Keen, p. 23.

²⁹ The best book about men I have read by a woman is Joan Shapiro, *Men: A Translation for Women* (New York: Dutton, 1992); see also Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men* (New York: Anchor Books, 1984); Jean Bolen, *Gods in Every Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989); Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1990); and Mary Van Leeuwen, *Gender and Grace* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity Press, 1990).

³⁰ Nancy Gibbs, "Fighting the Backlash Against Feminism: Susan Faludi and Gloria Steinem Sound the Call to Arms" *Time* (March 9, 1992), pp. 50-57.