



New York Cultural Center

In the Name of the Father? The Status of Fatherhood in Our Culture

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**transcript not reviewed by the speakers*

Cameron: Good evening. I am Fr. Peter Cameron and I would like to welcome all of you, and our panelists, on behalf of Crossroads New York Cultural Center.

As you just saw, we thought it would be interesting to open tonight's discussion by showing a sequence of quotes by various personalities on the theme of fatherhood. The purpose was to give witness to the fact that fatherhood (first of all having a father, but also being a father) is one of the most crucial and universal human experiences.

In fact, one could say that the experience of being generated is so basic and fundamental, that it is a constitutive aspect of being human. This is true even when the father is unknown, and the experience of fatherhood takes the shape of a question (who is my father? where is he?). What motivated us to discuss this theme is the observation that such an obviously universal and crucial experience is strikingly absent from today's public discussion. I would go as far as saying that in our culture there is a censorship on fatherhood, and that in many ways the very notion of fatherhood is rejected, or at least reduced, by associating it with oppression, patriarchy, alienation etc.

This creates, of course, a rather pathological situation, in which an abstract ideology does violence to one of the most basic and important human impulses. To discuss how this crisis of

fatherhood plays out at the different levels, we have here tonight an exceptional panel of speakers.

Our first speaker is Dr. Ronald Mincy. Dr. Mincy is Maurice V. Russell Professor of Social Policy and Social Work Practice at the School of Social Work, here at Columbia University, where he teaches graduate courses on social welfare policy, program evaluation, and microeconomics. Prof. Mincy has published widely on the effects of income security policy on child and family poverty, family formation, and child well-being; responsible fatherhood, the urban under class, and urban poverty. Dr. Mincy is a co-principal investigator for the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Survey, a birth cohort study of children born to unmarried parents, which is nationally representative of births in large cities. His most recent book Black Men Left Behind, examines the consequences of the 1990s economic boom for less-educated men. Dr. Mincy and his wife, Flona, married while both were graduate students. They have two adult sons, Daru and Ron Jr. Please welcome Dr. Ronald Mincy.

Mincy: Good evening. I didn't know I was going to have the privilege of speaking first so I can't gauge and read the audience, but that's okay.

I think that the problem of fatherhood in our culture is a problem first of perspective, and then of homeostasis or equilibrium. I'm an economist by training and the notion of equilibrium for an economist means that when you have a system that is stable and you do something that shocks that system, the system is in play, and all sorts of things are going on, but economists traditionally don't worry about doing the careful analysis until they analyze the post-shock equilibrium state. And I think that with respect to fatherhood in our culture, the problem is that we are trying to access the situation of fatherhood in a period of disequilibrium. And what we haven't seen yet, or we're not trying to anticipate is what the equilibrium might look like, and where are we heading, and will we end up in a place that's good for fathers, that's good for mothers, and that's good for children, and for our society. But it's also a challenge of perspective.

I think the first thing I'd like to do in these comments is applaud those fathers who go about their day to day business of being fathers, of working, of providing for their children, providing for their families on a day to day basis—the sort of unsung heroes that you never hear about. And it's because they are so invisible that, in a way, we have difficulty accessing what the sense of fatherhood is in our culture. That is to say, we don't have a baseline against which to compare all the noise that we hear about in terms of the problems of fatherhood. We kind of know that some of the glass is empty, some of the glass is full, but we don't really know what the proportions are—whether the part that's empty is half or one-third or whatever—and it's difficult therefore, because we're always hearing about the problems of fatherhood, for us to gauge again what the equilibrium situation is like, and against which to compare these negative things that are going on.

However, although it's difficult to get the proportions right, it is clear that the nation has a fatherhood problem, or problems, and this I think can best be described as against this idea of homeostasis or equilibrium.

I do a lot of interdisciplinary research and have had an opportunity to interact with different kinds of scholars, and I really got excited when I was working on a paper on child development, and I learned what the word *homeostasis* means. It was sort of a real joy for me to hit this idea of disequilibrium and equilibrium in a different scientific context.

Childhood development specialists talk about homeostasis as a stage or an activity in human development when a child cries and a child is upset, and they cry to the point of getting hoarse. Well it's to ability, though, to come back to a period of normalcy. And so you expect a disturbance to elicit a response, sometimes a violent one, but human development really depends upon the ability of a natural process to take over, by which the child restores normalcy of their breathing and their emotions and the like. And again I think this is important for an understanding of the culture of fatherhood because I really do think that we are trying to evaluate fatherhood in a period of disequilibrium. So I would like to talk a little bit about what that disequilibrium is all about.

So, the other thing I've been doing in the past year or so is (again I'm an economist so I have to keep apologizing for that) reading studies from sociology on gender roles in our society. And I think the disequilibrium that we are getting around the state of fatherhood is all about the inability of men, or the slow pace at which men are adjusting to changes in gender roles in our society. I was reading earlier this semester several papers by Talcott Parsons who is a renowned sociologist who heads gender issues in his writing, but he talks about how the United States in the 40s and 50s was a peculiar nation in a sense that boys and girls went to school together, even to higher education, and it was not the practice in the United States, he argued, to separate the roles of men and women in education, but they did become separated in adulthood where men were able to forecast that they would devote themselves to their careers, they would get married, they would raise a family, and it was a well-defined script for them that kept them on-target. On the other hand, the roles of women were relatively confused because her role depended upon where she was in her family development, and in what society allowed her to do. So, again this is a description of pre-World War II, middle class families in the United States. And it really did describe the role of women as one of great confusion because once men graduate from higher education, they are focused on career, heading a family, and the like. But the role of women very much depended upon where her children were, and where she was in the course of their development. So during that stage in which her children were young and depended very much upon her day to day care, her focus was clearly defined around homemaking, caring for her children, and the like, but as her children matured, and their direct need for her changed, she had to find a new set of activities that defined her identity, and some women did that more successfully than others. And so it really did describe a sense of disequilibrium for women as they adjusted from the role of homemaker to the role of assisting (particularly for professional

women) her husband in his career, in his profession in life, and some women adjusted to those transitioning roles more successfully than others.

Well, the post-World War II period has changed much of that in a whole variety of ways, including radical declines in discrimination against women in the labor market and education, increase in the labor force participation rates of women, increases in their earnings, and the like, and fundamentally, changes in their gender roles. While, on the other hand, there have been equally profound changes in gender roles for men.

In part, the way I like to think about these gender roles is to fast-forward a little bit, and to note that the average earnings of most men in this country have not budged since 1974. That is, since I graduated from high school, the average hourly earnings of most men in this country have not increased by more than ten cents or more for 35 to 40 years. Yet we also see, obviously, radical changes of the role of men in families and in the ability to carry out the gender roles that were scripts for them, given to them by their fathers and grandfathers. The idea that they would devote themselves to their careers, raise families, head families, and in a way, certainly not share an equal role with their wives in executing these various home and domestic functions. And I think the slow pace at which men have adjusted to changes in the gender roles of women really creates the context for understanding what the disequilibrium is all about.

We've also had, by the way, changes in law which has in a way moved along with the changes in the gender roles of men and women which I think further disrupt this equilibrium status for men. Let me mention a few.

In the first place, we're now at a place since 1981 where 50% of all marriages end in divorce or separation. That means that for younger Americans they are less likely to define adulthood as—there are certain markers for adulthood. There's a recent study undertaken by Frank Furstenberg and his colleagues that interviewed young people between 24 and 30 years old, or so, and asked them to define what are the markers for adulthood. Whereas 20 years ago the markers for adulthood would have included definitely marriage and raising a family, most young people today who are my son's age define adulthood as: completing my education, living independently, but marriage and raising a family are not part of the unsolicited markers that they would volunteer as adulthood. And let me suggest why that might be so. First of all, the average age of marriage in the United States obviously has increased. Many men and women, but particularly women, are postponing marriage for education and completing their careers, but it is also important that the divorce rate in the United States is 50/50. So for young men, the probability that they will devote themselves to their careers, invest in their families, and have the opportunity to reap the benefits of those investments all in their life cycle is 50/50. They are as likely to complete that process as not. As a consequence, what we see is a decline in the interest and likelihood of marriage for both men and women, but for the moment, I want to focus on this notion of men.

Men are today more likely to be interested in contraception as they are in family planning. That is to say, the very ambivalence about becoming the status of father means that men are postponing that status until they can establish it in such a way that they are more likely to be successful and long-lasting. They postpone marriage, but premarital sex is quite common. Today we can account for almost all of the increase in non-marital births in the last 15 years by births to cohabitating couples. That is, non-marital births no longer come from one night stands, but they come from couples who are in marriage-like relationships, some argue, and often their children are unintended, so they often do everything they can do to prevent having children in the first place, i.e., from the man's vantage point, to prevent acquiring the status of father until they're process of family formation works itself out and they can be more sure than not that this situation will last, and as a consequence, at that point they are willing to have children.

The other markers of again changes in law and social policy that support this notion of disequilibrium and ambivalence around fatherhood are changes in child support laws. I was at a conference on August 26, 1996 when the last welfare reform was passed. As was mentioned, I was married for 32 years, and I was sitting in the conference typing something on my computer in the audience, and the speaker came to the podium and announced, "Nothing is certain but death, taxes and child support." And even I shuddered because it just had this feel to it that "nothing is certain but death, taxes and child support." So today men have a 50/50 chance of focusing on their careers, nailing their careers, establishing their earnings and not having the ability of continuing in relationships with their children over their life cycle, and controlling the resources over which they've spent so much time gaining the control—they have a 50/50 chance of not doing that. Moreover, over one-third of all children in the United States are born to non-martial fathers, and as a consequence they are immediately upon the birth of the child, well, at the conception of the child, may even lose the capacity to determine whether or not—and again, this is all in part a consequence of a greater egalitarian position—recently for women increases in gender equity, which are important and good things, but their consequences for men are disequilibrium, and men are having a difficulty adjusting to it.

So now, given that, one-third of all children in the United States—of all children, not just black children—are born to non-martial mothers. That means that many of these children were conceived and not born, but men today have the prospect increasingly of siring children but having no control whatsoever in the law of whether or not those children ever their first breath.

So this is a consequence I think, or a manifestation of the antipathy about the status of fatherhood, and the question it leaves men with is a great deal of uncertainty about the difference between equality on the one hand—many men are confused about whether, young men in particular, as to whether equality means *indistinguishable*. Does my equality with respect to my wife, with respect to my partner, mean that I undertake exactly the same roles that she does? Is it necessary that I am to have an attitude that my wife, the mother of my child, is equal to me in my household? Does that mean that there are no places that I am insecure about where it is that I am supposed to exercise leadership and where it is that I am supposed to be a follower? So can we

have equality but certainty as to what gender roles are all about so that men can go about doing the things that they need to do as men and fathers, and embrace the status of fathers as opposed to postponing this very important status until they reach the point they feel it is safe to do so?

I will close my remarks in making several other observations in thinking about what the equilibrium might look like. In the social sciences, the disequilibrium about fathers is manifest in several other ways. First of all, there is an increasing fraction of men who will find themselves in the role of being fathers to someone else's children. Because divorce rates are so high, because non-marital birth rates are so high, many children in the United States are born into, are raised by blended parents. I work in a school of social work, and we do all sorts of family and home interventions. But one of the things that we don't do, despite the fact that 50% of all families in the United States are divorced or separated, and very high proportions of children—minority children especially—are raised in unmarried households, we do not in the premier school of social work in the country have a curriculum around training blended families on how to raise their children as a team. How to function effectively as a team when I, the father, am raising—because custody normally goes to the mother whether there's a non-marital birth or whether there's a divorce or a separation, in most instances when there is a stepfather, the stepfather is coming into the mother's home and raising their common child, but raising her other child. And in the premier school of social work in the country, as well as many social work schools, there is no course on how to help blended families, particularly fathers, figure out when do I have license to intervene in the disciplinary practices with respect to her child? Do I have the ability to talk to my stepdaughter about when she should be coming home, who should she go out with? Often couples don't get into this debate, don't get into these subjects until they're right in the middle of them. If you don't prepare them to understand that as a consequence of their coming together they will have challenges raising her children, and one consequence of dealing with it is required to sort of forecast what some of those challenges will be like in order to enable them to more successfully raise her children and their children well.

The other manifestation of this disequilibrium is that in the social sciences, we really do not know what or how fathers influence the child's well being. I find that extraordinary. In the science of child development, we have studied motherhood ad nauseam. We do parent-child interaction studies of how exactly mothers through their warmth and nurturing contribute to their intrusiveness or failure to be intrusive contribute to child development. What we don't know in the case of marital fathers and certainly not in the case of non-marital fathers, there is not a well-developed social science to understand how fathers contribute to the well being of their children.

When my wife was pregnant I thought my job was to go get the oranges. That was the greatest mission that I had. My wife is hungry. The woman consumed oranges. It was frightening. And I thought my job was that if I delivered the oranges, she would deliver healthy children. And when I went into the delivery room, you know what they did? They kicked me out because I almost fainted!

Today men go into the process of fatherhood with an extraordinary amount of ignorance and uncertainty, not knowing how they're supposed to contribute to the process, in what ways they can contribute to the child's well-being, in part because the social science of child development is not very far along in figuring out how exactly do they do that.

However, I think the important way to begin to figure this out, and to go back towards equilibrium is to ask the children, both the young and the old. To ask the children, to learn from the children, both young and old, how their fathers contribute to their well-being. And I was looking for it, I didn't have a chance to nail it, but I believe in Psalm 1 or Psalm 3 it talks about the psalmist being planted by the living water. The word *father* in Scripture means *source*. It means *source* or *origin*. And if you think about it, how do we get out of disequilibrium and approach something which has roots so that we know, as we're trying to figure out the difference between equality on the one hand, and indistinguishable on the other, how do we anchor ourselves, especially men, to figure out how to grow into this new role of fatherhood where there is gender equity on the one hand, but I understand what kind of role a father is? And to me as a father of two sons and a scholar on fatherhood, this word *source* is very important, because if the source is not anchored, neither will the leaves of the trees, which are for the healing of the nations, be.

I think it's really critical for men, as they come into a new role of advancing this idea around gender equity, to understand that to be equal is not to be the same. There are some areas in which I know that my wife is the "man" on this. She is real clear that she's got more control over this area than I do. I've learned to depend on, I got wise when I was 20 years old, and I understood that my wife had what I would call "radar." She was able to read people in ways that I was absolutely clueless about. And I began to defer to her on these unobservable pieces of information. When I was dealing with a banker, a real estate agent, a young student, and my wife would go into a room and do that thing, I said, "Oh! Okay." But this is my wife and my relationship, but there are many ways in which I have certain skills, I have certain abilities, and they are opportunities for me to exercise leadership. But I also know that there are some other areas in which I am clueless, and I depend upon my wife and her functioning so that we can raise our children, our family together. But I also understand *source*. I also understand that I'm to be anchored. I also understand that when I get un-anchored things in my family just don't go as well as they do otherwise. And I think, in part, by understanding, by acquiring this role of *source*, by accepting the responsibility that this is where it begins, by being willing to share roles and responsibilities with the women in our lives, we can come to some place where we simultaneously have an attitude and execution about equality on the one hand, but we're able to distinguish when we're a father and when we're something else. And this is where I hope the equilibrium will lead us to.

I look forward to our ongoing discussion about what the disequilibrium looks like, but I hope in entertaining the disequilibrium, we will also forecast what's the homeostasis? Where's the place that we can settle down, where we can have both equality on the one hand, but we can be

distinguishable, we can be leaders, we can be sources, fathers, and maybe embrace the role. It's very interesting as I listen to the research in the social science and the public policy around fatherhood; it's always about what fathers contribute to child and family well-being. And there is so little discussion about what men acquire for themselves as a consequence of executing their role as fathers, and in part, I think one of the reasons why many men, particularly minority men, are at risk is because they do not have the opportunity, they do not have the responsibility of being *source*, and as a consequence, the returns of seeing the leaves on the trees grow and prosper, the returns of seeing yourself reproduced economically in terms of character and other things in your children—those things are increasingly absent in the lives of disadvantaged minority men, and as a consequence, they never achieve it, the homeostasis; they may never achieve the equilibrium that is important for all men and all people in our society. Then again there is hope that we have stimulated some conversation. Thank you.

Cameron: It is my pleasure to introduce to you now our second speaker who is Mr. John Waters. John Waters is a journalist, an author and a playwright. His first book Living at the Crossroads about the cultural underbelly of Irish politics was a best-seller. His other publications include Race of Angels, a study of the roots of U2's music in Irish history and culture. His most recent book is The Politburo Has Decided That You Are Unwell. His award-winning plays include *Long Black Coat* and *Easter Dues*. Mr. Waters writes a popular weekly column for *The Irish Times*. He and his daughter Róisín live in Dublin. It is now our pleasure to welcome Mr. John Waters.

Waters: Thank you, Father. Good evening. My father died in June, 1989 and I didn't know it at the moment but he died within 24 hours of the Ayatollah Khomeini and they were buried on the same day, at the same time, but I wasn't aware that the Ayatollah had died until I returned from the graveyard, and went into the local pub, and on the television screen I saw the images which some of you will recall, and they were described by Don DeLillo, a great American novelist in one of his books, *Mao II*. I'll just read it because I couldn't put it better what I saw. It is told by his character, and his character is called Karen, and this is what she saw and she watched the images that I saw:

The living forced their way into the burial site, bloodying their hands and tearing at their hair, choking in the thick dust, and the body of Khomeini rested in a flimsy box, a kind of litter with low sides, and Karen found she could go into the slums of south Tehran, backwards into people's lives, and hear them saying, We have lost our father. All the dispossessed waking to the morning call. Sorrow, sorrow is this day.

When I read that, there was just one thing, the last sentence is wrong. Because what he should have said is, "Terror, terror is this day." And after 9/11 I wrote a piece with that title: "Terror, Terror Is This Day". I could see the faces of those hundreds, thousands of people who saw it that day to prevent the body of their father going into the ground. But what consumed them was not sorrow, but fear. They did not want, anymore than I did, their father to leave them, for how could

they face the terrors of the world without him? DeLillo wrote, “The living touched the body that pressed the Imam’s flesh to keep him warm.”

I was born in the west of Ireland. My father was a milk car driver. He was 50 when I was conceived I discovered by a process of investigation. Nothing to do with my mother. I wouldn’t dare ask her such a question. I was conceived on his 50th birthday, so I’m never quite sure whether I was a celebration or a consolation. So he was a milk car driver and being 50 years older than me, he was almost like my grandfather. He was quite an eccentric man, a very unmaterialistic demeanor. He dressed in rags and he drove this van which was always on the point of collapse, so he always had spare van parts, and as a child growing up, I became his assistant. I was an only son. I had three sisters. But I became his mechanical assistant. Sunday was the day that he wanted for fixing the van, and I would spend most of that day handing him wrenches underneath the van or holding down the brake pedal as he bled the brakes. And I remember with great clarity one particular summer when I was about 10 years of age, he had an old engine which he wanted to recondition and he asked me if I would grind the valves of this engine, which is an extraordinary job. The valves are like nails and underneath the surface is a grain, and you need to match the grain with the cylinder block with a stick with a suction pad at the end. You just turn it endlessly for hours and hours and hours, for days and days and days. And for an entire summer I ground the valves of this van, and each evening he would come back and he had this habit of putting his glasses up on his forehead and peering down and looking he said, “No, it needs more grinding.” And this went on and on and on. In the end, coming close to the end of the summer he pronounced the valves sufficiently ground, and he put the engine back together; he put it into the van and started it up. And the engine was like a new watch, the way it turned. For many years afterwards, that to me was simply an episode, a chore that I had performed at my father’s request. He’d imposed on my availability to an extent, made me do something extraordinarily boring, monotonous.

It was many, many years after, and this is the part I want to come to: Fatherhood is only visible in its absence. It isn’t visible in its presence. It is only afterwards I read an essay about it by one of the great writers, Robert Bly. He’s introducing a book by Alexander Mitscherlich, a great psychoanalyst from Germany, called *Society without a Father*. Robert Bly, in the course of about two thousand words, describes fatherhood in a way that I’ve never, ever seen it described before because he talks about the crisis of fatherhood, what we’re talking about tonight, and he talked about what happened and he said the most astonishing things. First of all he says that we have reached a point in human history which has never been reached before in this regard. That two million years of evolution has been truncated, has been broken in our lifetimes. The reign of what he calls “the great father” has ended in our lifetimes. “The great father” he describes in a very simple way. What did the great father do? The great father worked with objects in full view of his children. “He fumbled incompetently with nuts and bolts and saws leaving spaces between his competences for his children to grow.” And that, says Bly, has ended in our lifetimes. The father has vanished to the factory, to the coal mine, to the war, leaving his children behind to

their mothers. And the society which had done this to the father then pointed at him and accused him of deserting his children. And ideologically society portrayed that banishment, that necessary banishment from the industrial revolution as having been a choice made by the father, that in a sense he skipped gaily down the garden paths to the coal mine, leaving his children clawing at the window pane. And this preposterous idea has now been accepted by our societies—as much by my society as I gather by your society.

I became a father myself eleven years ago when many of this began to become relevant to me. I began to think because I had to think. It was think or die, and I don't mean that in any metaphorical sense. I was living in a situation of having a child, I wasn't married, in a society that was telling me two different things. It was telling me, "You must carry out your responsibility to your child; you must do this." And I thought, Okay, that's not a problem. "You must do this, and if you don't, we will think ill of you. We will ostracize you; you will be an outcast if you fail to do this, carry out this responsibility." And I said, "I'm all for it. What do you need me to do?" In fact, I don't need you to tell me what to do because I have this fist between my shoulder blades, the fist of tradition which is driving me onwards to do this thing, so I don't need any guidance ideologically from you. But then I found an extraordinary thing, that as soon as I was pedaling forward, the society which had been telling me, "You must, you must, you must, you must!" said "No, no, no. Stop. Why do you want to do this? What are you trying to do?" I remember when a so-called child psychiatrist interviewing me about my child stared me in the eyes and she said, "I'm looking for your ulterior motive." I said, "What kind of father do you have?" Then I told her a story which I had just heard a couple weeks before about a father whose daughter was killed in the Lockerbie bombing and he had pursued relentlessly over a decade the perpetrators of this bomb attack and succeeded in having them extradited from Libya to The Hague to be tried. He was interviewed on the radio and the interviewer had a strange sense of incomprehension as this so-called child psychiatrist had towards me, and said, "Why are you doing this? Ten years it took; why do you do this?" And he said, "It's very simple; she was my daughter; I had no choice." I understand that, but the society doesn't understand; my society doesn't; I don't think your society understands it. It doesn't understand that simple idea that the father doesn't have to do anything to be father. He just has to be. And in the background radiation of his presence, he allows his children to become themselves. And instead the society seeks to justify an ideological position which it has arrived at for entirely different reasons, which I'll come to in a moment, by accusing the father of being feckless, irresponsible, inadequate, in effect, for not being a mother.

And why is this? Well, I've had to go through this journey as a father, as a human being, as a journalist writing in Ireland about this because I'm staggered by what I discovered because Ireland, like the United States, is an advanced democratic republic and liberty is valued, equality is valued, justice is valued highly, and yet I struggled. In this particular area there were none of these qualities available; justice was not available; equality was not available. There was this extraordinary hypocrisy which I define as follows: This society would excoriate me as long as it

seemed like I was going to walk away from my child. It would excoriate me. The only time my society would excoriate me worse than it did if I walked away, is if I didn't walk away from my child, if I didn't, if I called its bluff. If I started to say, Okay, I can do that. Get out of my way. But they basically refused to.

It has its court—family court, so-called, which pretends that they're engaged in some kind of process of where arbitration about difficult intractable difficulties. They're not. They're about driving wedges between parents in order to fulfill what I believe is some kind of convoluted ideological agenda. Now when I say that, I'm not a conspiracy theorist. I don't believe that any set of intelligent people gathered in a particular room to work this out... but I don't necessarily believe that we should think in those terms when we're talking about these things. The idea of cultural conspiracy is much more interesting.

This is my first time in New York. I walked around. I'm absolutely staggered. I think in New York it's more visible than in most cities, this idea of collective intelligence—that something can be arrived at by a process of individual people operating in different ways at different times for different reasons, but coming to a common converging result. And that happens in political cultures, sociological cultures, ideological cultures as well.

Our societies are actually willing the banishment of the father for reasons which are complex but which can be broken down and looked at very carefully if you start to ask formulated questions. I family law jurisdictions of two countries, Ireland and the United Kingdom to get joint custody of my daughter, and she spends half the time with me now and half the time with her mother. We live in Dublin. It works very well. I think I could recommend it to any set of parents as a solution to the difficulty. This is not rocket science. It's very simple. It is possible for separated parents to bring up children in a happy and contented and safe way. If our societies wanted that, then that's available, but the societies don't want that because I believe that we have hit on a moment in history, and I don't share the previous speaker's optimism about this because I've watched it for a long time and felt it for a long time, and I hear stories of men. Because I've written about things, I hear stories. There are days when I hear stories that make me want to return to bed and cover my head. At least twice a week I feel like that—hearing the stories of men tell me what is done to them because they sought to love their children. There is an act of brutalization of father in our societies, a willful brutalization. I think we're beyond the equality stage. I think whatever issues of equality, gender equality, so-called, I've come to the conclusion that gender equality means equality for women, it doesn't mean the other way around. It never did and never will.

But there are more fundamental things in play. And the way I characterized them as controversial and unpopular to say things like this but what we're actually talking about is in an individualized society what we've arrived at is the concept of ownership of children, and ownership of children resides with mothers. That's the nature of their ideology and there's no escaping it. In Ireland we have a constitution going back to 1937 which we've got to come to a different time has a very

carefully calibrated concept of rights in which the family, initially the nuclear, married family, is said to have inalienable and inalienable rights which means that these rights cannot be taken away and cannot be given up; they belong to this family, but an interesting thing is happening now, in the last generation where there's been attempts to introduce new rights. Suddenly somebody says, "Oh, there are no children's rights in the constitution." But in fact there are, but they're vested in this...they're like this 3-pointed star—father, mother, child. And those rights are very carefully bound up in a kind of molecule that is the family. But ideological interests attack this and say, "There are no rights for children so we must introduce these rights for children." In doing this they do a number of things. First of all, they pull the rights away from the family as it is, they separate the father, mother and child, and they take the child's rights and they vest them in the state. Therefore, the state becomes both father and mother. It introduces distance which divides the family. Any single mother in Ireland, (I think the situation in the United States is probably quite similar), who allows the father of her child to actually live with them would be probably insane because she can make vastly more money from the state if she banishes the father and lives apart from him. It's something like 2 to 3 times her income, unless he's earning at least twice the average national wage. That's the kind of construction which is actually attacking the very fabric of the family unit. I don't mean the family unit in any sort of conservative sense. I mean just de facto unit which constitutes father, mother, child.

So we have actually arrived at a situation where the father is no longer, as my father was, in our presence in a free and unobtrusive way—in a way that can be taken for granted. The father now actually exists, (and this is as true for me even though I have joint custody of the child, this is true for me as for any father) is there as a matter of grace and favor. We are there by permission of the mother. We exist as fathers because the mother thinks it's a good idea. If she didn't, it wouldn't happen. I don't think there's a court in Ireland, the United States or the United Kingdom which would actually uphold the rights of the father to be with his children over the mother if she didn't want it. In any country, a mother, if she decides to go to a different country, if the mother takes the child to a different country from Ireland, it's regarded as a decision she's made for the welfare of the child; the authority can do nothing. If the father does it, he'll be put in jail. We have this grotesque double standard we apply in a society that lays claim to the concept of equality.

So what is this all about? I have come to the conclusion that it's about something very fundamental and it has to do with the very concept of the child's life. Because if the father were to be given rights of any kind—never mind equal rights, legally, constitutionally or otherwise—we would be in a situation in our societies where a father would be able to prevent an abortion. And that is something our society is not prepared to countenance, and it is as basic and as simple as that. At the very bottom of this we come to the issue of abortion. It's very interesting that those organizations, those forces in our society that campaign against abortion never, ever, ever elude to the father as being a player in the sense of having rights which have to be calibrated into this equation. Never.

So the question I come to then is a very fundamental question about our societies and men: What kind of machines do our societies presume that men are that they can do the following? That they can be told that perhaps in 8 months time they will become a father, they can be told that. And our societies, they will demand that those men invest in that relationship all their passion and energy and their love, and their hunter and gatherer impulse, everything they can summon. Our society will not tolerate any failure to bring all those resources out of themselves and deliver them for the good of that child. But wait a minute. Hold up. Don't get carried away here because there's a decision to be made, and it isn't yours. So just hold that passion and love and duty and responsibility—hold it there because we've got to wait. There's a decision being made. I think it's okay. Hold it. Hold it there. So what does our society think that a man is? He's got a tap somewhere where he can turn on his passion for his child? Turn it off. Turn it on. Turn it off. Turn it on. And this passion is going to be real? Where would it come from? From what source could a man find that passion in a society which would tell him that his child might never live and that he can do nothing about it? And this to me is the real issue of abortion. We will never, ever, ever, ever, ever defeat the scourge of abortion until we begin to consider the father because he is ultimately the protector of his child. And unless the society, our societies back him, abortion will continue and continue and continue. And our societies, in their present mood, are not disposed to even discuss this.

As a father, you just have to wait for a decision to be made...I had to wait. So I don't know where these feelings came from. They came. I felt I was haunted. When my child was a baby, I felt I was haunted by my father, by his father, by his father. They told me, "There are ways we do these things, and you're not going to be the one to break the line, the tradition."

But many, many fathers don't have that force within them, and so they do what I believe is the most rational and sensible thing—they leave, they go away. They say, "I can't handle this. I can't deal with this because I don't have a tap to turn on and off." It's easier for me. I talk to men. In the oddest moments they tell me, "The easiest thing for me to do would be just to leave, to walk away. " And I always say to them, "You have to give yourself permission to walk away because if you don't, then it's not a free choice, but having given yourself permission, I beg you to stay for today. Stay for today. Tomorrow will look after itself." And that's all I can say to men when they ask me: Stay with this intolerable, incredible, grotesque, barbaric, brutalizing culture, but one day at a time. Thank you.

Cameron: We are honored to have as our third speaker Dr. Paul Vitz. Dr. Vitz received his Ph.D. in Psychology from Stanford University; he is a Professor Emeritus in Psychology at New York University. At present Dr. Vitz is a Professor and Senior Scholar at The Institute for the Psychological Sciences in Arlington, VA, new Catholic graduate program, fully accredited, that gives the Doctor of Psychology degree in clinical psychology. Prof. Vitz has published many articles and several books—his latest two being Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism and The Self: Beyond the Postmodern Crisis. Dr. Vitz's work has focused on a Christian/Catholic understanding of personality, counseling and forgiveness. He lives here in

Manhattan with his wife Timmie, a Professor of French and Medieval Studies at NYU. They have six children and seven grandchildren. Please welcome Dr. Vitz.

Vitz: Thank you. I have two difficult acts to follow. I'm going to be speaking obviously about fathers from a psychological perspective. We've heard the sociological or economic perspective and we've heard a very powerful personal, artistic, literary understanding, so now you'll hear a psychologist. I am a psychologist...[laughter...inaudible]

I think that we all understand that there is much of a crisis in our culture today, and that that crisis is centered in family, and I think it's a common place, at least here, by now, that the crisis in the family is a crisis with fathers. It's the absence of fathers in the family that is at the center of our cultural malaise in crisis or its equilibrium.

One of the first things that I think is important in trying to get the culture to understand this problem is for the importance of the father to be not only clearly documented, which in some ways it already has been, but to become familiar in our psychology departments, in our sociology departments, and in other places in the culture where this information is necessary before any kind of positive change where a new equilibrium could arise.

And so I want to summarize some of the things that psychology or I think that sometimes merges into social psychology or possibly even sociology, know about the importance of fathers. And before I get to some of these settings, I want to mention something that is mentioned in the Scripture. There are a fair number of times in both the Old and the New Testament in which the sins of the fathers are referred to. They are passed on for three or maybe even to seven generations. To the best of my knowledge, there are no mentions of the sins of the mothers. What might this mean? As a psychologist, I'm not saying that there aren't mothers who cause problems for their children. No. But I would like to say this about motherhood: On average, because motherhood seems to be more of a natural or biological or culturally agreed to phenomenon, mothers tend to be more reliable as mothers than fathers are as fathers. So in terms of foundational sinning, or child's experiences, mothers are less likely to do that. If they do do it, if they do abandon the child, or if they do behave very badly to the child, the culture is so set up, and has been traditionally, so that other women spot it pretty quickly, and another mother will step in, a sister, a grandmother, because it becomes obvious that if the mother is bad, in the first year or so, the child isn't even going to survive. So the mothers tend to be more reliable, and when they're unreliable, other women step in more often. And finally, if a child receives really very bad mothering from the beginning, that child who grows up is usually so dysfunctional that they're not in much of a position to pass on those sins to the society. If it's truly a dysfunctional mother, and if it isn't repaired by other mothers, the child, unless a father comes in to pick up that role, the child is likely to be so depressed or so dysfunctional, he will end up in a mental ward—not able to function in the society.

But fathers, if the mother does an adequate job and the father is not there, the child is usually quite capable of functioning somewhat in the society. Unfortunately when the father is not there, his children may often function in very harmful ways. I'll get to some of that evidence shortly. And unfortunately our society does not have a good way of bringing in substitute fathers. Substitute fathers are very important and I think they have a big potential future for our culture if we'd only wake up to it. Just as an example, I think many high school boys find their high school coach, their football or basketball coach functioning as a substitute father in many ways. So there can be substitute fathers if we begin to work at it. But we're not going to work at this until we realize the importance of fathers, period.

And so now I'd like to talk a little bit about the basic finding in research of the importance of the father. The first thing that's been found, and this has been so frequently documented, so foundational, it's unbelievable I didn't find it in any of my university courses, but over 50 years ago, two psychologists, sociologists at Harvard found when they were studying something called juvenile delinquency, something of an anachronistic term now, they found that the major determinants of criminal behavior in young boys was family structure, and the major determinates that they found were actually predicting criminal behavior, they found that over and over again in the major summary of the research published in 1950, it was the absence of the father, or if the father was present it was the absence of his working with the children, the absence of discipline, the absence of cohesiveness. Let's look at a more recent study than 1950. Here's one done in England, about 1980. There have been many, many others. Some people have said that our prisons are essentially holding pens for fatherless youths. Over and over again. Here's an example. A friend of mine who did work in prison ministry decided it would be nice if he would have all the prisoners send a card to their mother on mother's day. So they talked to the prisoners, they gave them a card, and they did this and they all said they sort of liked this. Then he asked, when father's day came a little bit later, do you want to send a card to your father on father's day? No one came for a card, not one. Over 90% of them didn't even know where their father was. So there's the fatherless phenomenon showing up in criminal behavior.

Almost 90% of our violent criminal behavior in our country is done by young men. So one of the prices we pay for the absence of fathers is this criminal activity. A study was done in England in the 1980s, a very careful investigation, and they looked at boys who grew up in the inner cities in England versus in the suburbs. They looked at those who grew up with one parent, usually the father, who had a criminal record. They wanted to find out if whether having a parent who was a criminal was a predictor of their being arrested. The other was, does it make a difference if you grow up in the inner city versus the suburbs? And the third was whether they grew up in a family that had discipline which meant that the father was present. And then they looked at the arrest rates of the three different categories, and if you had somebody in your family who had a criminal record, there was a significant increase in your likelihood of being a criminal yourself by about 100%. If you grew up in a handicapped social environment, your criminality went up to about a little over 200%. But if you grew up in a family, no matter where it was, where you

didn't have discipline and order, your tendency to be a criminal, your arrest record went up over 700%. That was the real factor. Over and over they find that family structure is the major determinant of criminal propensity in young people. There are many, many studies on this, and it's always been found in country after country. So criminal behavior is one of the things; it's the price of not having fathers present.

No there are other things that they have found when the father's not present, besides the tendency of the children to be criminals. You can see what happens. The poor mother can't discipline the children when the father isn't present. She's loaded with trying to either work part-time or maybe even full-time, and she has the children. How can she do it? Raising a family is a two-adult job, a two-person job. Sometimes I think it's a ten-person job! In any case, she has special problems disciplining sons. And they tend to go out and get in groups of other young men looking for some way to prove themselves, and criminal behavior is a common way. It's almost a cliché. It's like mosquitoes cause malaria. Fatherlessness leads to higher criminal rates.

There are other things they've found. There are cognitive deficits in children who are raised without fathers. There are increases in the tendency to be, if you will, oriented toward the present lack of ability to delay gratification which sometimes we call in psychology "gender confusion problems" showing up both in higher rates of homosexuality and in higher rates of a kind of macho extreme. So you're going to prove to yourself you're a man by robbing a bank or whatever.

So there are many ways in which the society does pay the price of fatherlessness, and we haven't made this clear enough to our young men of how important it is that they be present. And presence is much of what it means. I'm going to give you two examples. A friend of mine, a good father, had to be away when his family was at home in a normal setting, and there was a huge thunderstorm, a huge storm, and it scared the children. It made everybody a little nervous; it was really something spectacular. The father was away on a trip. He comes back the next day and his daughter runs up and says, "Dad, where were you? It was so scary without you." Just presence. That's what's needed. Not only, but that's half of it. And we need to have this message communicated to our culture so that they understand that fathers are doing this—having this positive effect on their children. We need more examples. We have them, but they haven't been given a lot of emphasis on things like what I would call "the Mozart effect." You know, Mozart never would've been Mozart without his father; otherwise he just would've been a talented, probably amateur. Michael Jordan wouldn't have been a basketball player without his father. Tiger Woods wouldn't have become a great golfer either. There is some young Korean girl who is terrific at golf. Her father is working with her all the time.

The father is, more than anyone else, the person who mediates the child's contact with the outside world, introduces the child to that outside world, and makes that outside world seem safe. It's okay out there. Dad will show me this. He'll take us camping, he'll take us playing sports, he'll show me how to play chess, whatever. Some years ago, I saw a little report in a newspaper

here in the city. I forget his name now. I probably should remember. It's some big banker who's head of Citigroup, and his daughter had just had her first merger in acquisition, and he was right there with her. Sandy Wyle, that was his name! He was there looking out for her, helping her and so on.

It's that outside world. The mother forms the child wonderfully, normally, usually in the family—emotionally, interpersonally. The father, even when he plays with children, they find big differences in how fathers and mothers play with children. In fact, fathers often play with their children more than mothers. And the typical thing is you give a child to a mother, and she usually holds the baby to herself. You give him to a father and he's likely to toss him up in the air! They've documented this. It's in psychological studies looking at how the interactions between a one-year-old child and the father and mother are different. They've all been done only in about the last five or ten years—research to look at. So fathers tend to play with the child more, bring it moving objects, move it around, carry it around, throw it up over its back, hang it upside down—things like that. It's commonplace. I've seen it with my sons-in-law and my own son. I've seen it with our children. We've got quite a brood out there now. It's true—seven grandchildren and two on the way. So I see a lot of children, a lot of fathers.

But we need to get at this importance of the father for leading the child out, because when that isn't done, there's criminal behavior, there's resentment against authority that didn't come through for him—your father wasn't there, so those who represent authority or fathers you dislike or resent or have to challenge. It's very common. We need to know about that and get at the importance of it. Our universities don't have this in their courses.

One of my psychological colleagues told me that today in the United States, adolescence goes to age 30. And I asked why. And he said, “You know, you have people still in school, some of my students and graduate students are 27 and 28 and they were so depressed about their life because they didn't know what they were yet. My mother, when I was her age, I was her third child; they had a house; they had all sorts of things.” Well, I was part of that years ago, and getting married was hardly an end to adolescence, but not nearly so much as having a child. Having a child and becoming a father is the wake-up call for a man to become a man. Our understanding of manhood is too much of a kind of, at best, a James Bond—a man, as I've said before, who has no bonds with anybody. No family, no father and mother, nothing. So when you have a child, you're likely to become a man. And you have to understand that the culmination of manhood is to become a father. All men are called to be fathers, not necessarily biological fathers. There's a good sprinkling of Catholic priests here. But they are called to be fathers to other people, to other people's children, to be substitute fathers, to be mentors. It's in passing yourself on to the younger generation that a man culminates his understanding of what it is to be a man, and we've truncated it as some kind of sexual, I don't know, some sort of level related to James Bond or *Playboy* magazine. Think about it, “play BOY.” You're not even a man. And of course, you look at *Playboy* and they'll never refer to people being fathers, they'll never have a baby in the

magazine. They're very carefully excluded. There's never any reference to any of that. That's the whole notion of Peter Pan—perpetual immaturity.

I mentioned substitute fathers; they are very important. And I'll conclude by mentioning a little bit about... I would argue that the crisis in culture is in the family and in the family it's in the father, and in fathers it's really a strange crisis in faith. The best models that we have on what it is to be a father and that are everywhere—in the Scriptures. They are clear. It's even because of the fact that fatherhood is more defined by society than motherhood, more defined by culture. That's maybe one of the reasons why Jesus was so insistent on speaking about His Father—to give a model to man who otherwise...we're vulnerable to opting out. So the ultimate crisis is there. And you know, there is a lot of evidence that the faith of children is related to the faith of their parents. But it's related significantly to the faith of the mother, but it's even more related to the faith of the father. If the father prays and is serious about religion, even if the children sort of rebel against it, they often come back to it because they love and respect their father and he has a kind of, "Yes, I've been in the outside world, and when you get out there, don't be afraid. Have the faith behind you." And that seems to be catching. They've done studies on this.

Of course, I did a lot of work on psychology and atheism. And I discovered that a huge number of famous atheists had very dysfunctional fathers. Their fathers were dysfunctional in being abusive, in being there but weak and unworthy of respect, or in some cases they were dysfunctional in just being absent through death. And in all of those cases, no substitute father ever came along. I could give you all kinds of strange stories of famous atheists and their incredibly terrible fathers. I'll mention one—Ludwig Feuerbach who was the first philosopher, a German philosopher, to propose that God was a projection of our psychological needs. He proposed this long before Freud talked about it, and Freud got this idea from Feuerbach; it's not a secret. When Feuerbach was 12 or 13 years old, his father was a famous jurist, legal scholar. His nickname though for his father was "Vesuvius." He always blew up, exploded. What does he do? He abandons the family, runs off with the wife of his best friend, and lives in another town in Germany not too far away. There he has a baby by this woman—the wife of his best friend, or one of his best friends—and names him after himself. This was an enormous rejection of the family, particularly (and even now) in the 1810-1820 period in small towns in Germany. It would've been incredible. And after three years of living with this woman, we don't know why, but she died, and so he comes back and lives with the family, still being known as "Vesuvius." He must've had a very patient and forgiving wife. I was unable to find out much about that psychology. There are plenty of other examples.

Now, I'm not saying that this is determined. Each person has a chance to take an attitude toward that father, and that attitude you can freely choose, but when your father has been an SOB, you're very likely to reject everything he stands for, and there's plenty of evidence to support this kind of interpretation in the life of people like Nietzsche, Freud, Hobbes, even Voltaire that I consider almost an atheist. He rejected his father so much that he took the name "Voltaire"; he made it up of course. Many others.

And then I look at the lives of famous theists at the same time, and they're just the opposite—strong, positive fathers...like Pascal who was home-schooled by his father. Many other people. G.K. Chesterton—he was sort of home-schooled by his father because his father was in a family business, real estate of some kind, and his father didn't like it, so he stayed home all the time. There are many other cases of that kind too.

Now recently in psychology this is all coming together in a symbol-conceptual frame, and it's called the study of attachment behavior and they're studying the attachment really which is the bond between the child and its mother, and separately between the child and its father. This goes back to John Bowlby's work and then Mary Ainsworth's work on attachment in children as a measure of the strength of the bond between the mother and child and father and child. Where does it come from? How does it develop? Fortunately in the last few years we've also been looking at how this bond develops with the father. You have two quite different attachment styles, one with your father and one with your mother. They can be quite different, how you relate to them. We're coming to understand that that attachment bond is extremely important for later behavior in terms of both mental problems that you might have if you have a severe attachment anxiety. It's found that insecurely attached people or ambivalently attached people, college students, are more likely to be atheists or agnostics than securely attached.

But that whole attachment thing is now being understood, and it's really (they don't call it that) but it's really the study of love. And how does it develop? It turns out that your attachment style to your parents relates to your romance styles; that is, your romantic life often replays earlier attachment difficulties. I finished a paper recently on St. Therese of Lisieux and her attachment problems which most everybody knows who knows something about her life which were caused by the death of her mother, and by the fact that her substitute mothers went off to the convent and abandoned her that way.

So I'm optimistic about the new research that's going to support the importance of fathers as well as mothers. I think the model that will develop will not be the model of equality; it will be the model of complementarity—a model in which more equivalence is assumed, but in terms of abilities and characteristics, they are seen as a compliment that to the other make it something bigger and better and greater than any one parent by itself. Male being female complementarity. It won't be that rigid and fixed, but it will be more than likely sort of 20 dimensions of personality that tend to be more one way for women or more one way for men. You put any couple together, of those 20, not all of them will be perfectly fit to the masculine or feminine pattern in terms of couple, but out of the logicum it will be, so that the children recognize right away that daddy is different from mama, even if mother does keep the finances and daddy is the chef, but they do it in different ways and there are a lot of other things that are done in a more traditional way. So although in a given dimension there might be a kind of flip-flop, the style of doing it even then will be male or female and probably, very likely, and they'll be a lot of the common dimensions of masculinity and femininity as each portrays to the children and lives well in a complimentary fashion.

This theory of complementarity has developed in a lot of recent Catholic writing. Even the Pope has written about it in terms of the theology of the body, the nuptial meeting of the body. So that gives me optimism about the future, but the long-term future. In the short run, which is where most of us live and probably die, at least in the historical short run, I am much more pessimistic. But on the positive side, I would say that there's one other thing that's coming along that's very, very interesting: In this country, home-schooling now involves almost two million children. These are children being schooled and educated at home, like Pascal, or John Steward Mill. And something new is going to come out of it. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had a whole bunch of new Mozarts? The universities are really very interested in getting these students because they tend to be very good.

But, in any case, these are possible signs of the future and we still have a big problem on our hands right now, and my suggestion is if the university world, which is sort of a built in personal menu of the professions would only begin to get literature out there, partly that's already there on the importance of fathers, then second, begin to do more of that, there might develop an attitude in which young university men would already begin to think to themselves, to be a real man I would really have to become a father of some kind. Let's say I'd like to get married and be a natural father. What am I going to be like? How am I going to work? Get them to think about that more in advance than most of them do now. Thank you.

Cameron: "I will arise and return to my father." These are the words that the Prodigal Son of the famous Gospel parable utters on the verge of despair. And we have to ask: Why? Why does the Prodigal Son conclude that the most reasonable thing for him to do in his plight is return to his father? Why his *father*? Why not return to his brother...or to his best friend...or to his therapist? Because the Prodigal Son knows that, in his hopeless situation, what he needs is to return to the single person who can restore his life and regenerate him. And that one person is his father.

The Prodigal Son's desire to return to his father represents a basic and originary impulse in all of us. From Homer's *The Odyssey*, to Sophocles' *Oedipus*, to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, to the film *Rebel without a Cause*, to Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*, to Harry Potter, to *The March of the Penguins* the search for the father has remained a predominant archetype in the narrative of literature, drama, and film. John Waters made the point that "fatherhood is only visible in its absence." As the renowned literary critic Roland Barthes put it: "If there is no longer a Father, why tell stories? Isn't storytelling always a way of searching for one's origins?" Which goes to the point of Dr. Mincey: "'Father' means 'source.'"

In the year 1960, when Albert Camus was killed in an automobile accident at the age of 47, people found in the wreckage of his car 144 manuscript pages that Camus had written—all of them about his search for his father. That search can result in hurt, frustration, anger, even violence. But as the poet Philip Levine once commented: "The search for the father goes on and

on until he's found...or until he comes home from his wanderings...and then you don't kill him; you hug him."

Why? What is it about an authentic father? As we search for the father, what are we looking for?

- 1) A father is someone who loves you simply because you are his.
- 2) A father is someone who knows the worst about you and who loves you all the more because you *need* to be loved more.
- 3) A father is someone who believes that you are the best child in the world—not because you do great things—but because you are his.
- 4) A father refuses to become fatalistic about your failures. Rather, in the words of John Waters, "By the background radiation of a father's presence, he lets his children become themselves." And the point made so well by Dr. Vitz: our failures are not scary if our father is present...even something as terrifying as a thunderstorm.
- 5) A father is someone who believes you can anything that he wishes because he wants *only what you can do*. Hence the quote from Robert Bly cited by John Waters: a father is one who "leaves spaces for the competences of his children to grow."

As Monsignor Massimo Camisasca points out: "A father desires to help his child truly to 'meet' himself and what is around him. He wants to make him walk on the earth without forgetting the stars." This love, this total acceptance is what the Prodigal Son was looking for.

And yet, the aversion to fatherhood today is enormous. However, the beginning of that aversion coincides with the beginning of time. Pope John Paul II wrote that one of the chief effects of original sin is that it "attempts to abolish fatherhood,...placing in doubt the truth about God who is Love and leaving man only with a sense of the master-slave relationship." This is the beginning of the "disequilibrium" that Dr. Mincy emphasized. John Waters adds the point: "Our society is *willing* the banishment of the father." But as Cardinal Walter Kasper has observed: "'Father' is a primal word in the history of humanity and religion; it cannot be replaced by another concept and it cannot be translated into another concept." Thomas Merton illustrates this where he writes: "Death ends a life, but it does not end a relationship, which struggles on in the survivor's mind toward some resolution, which it never finds . . . But, *still*, when I hear the word 'Father'!"

Amidst all the disorder left in us due to original sin, something in us defies living like a slave. Despite the doubt instilled in us by original sin, we persist in searching for a father who will love us in spite of our frailty and failure, and whose love will make it possible for us to be and to act in a way that exceeds our limitations.

Where does this certainty come from? From our *experience!* Pope Benedict XVI makes it clear: “The word ‘Father’ makes me sure of one thing: I do not come from myself; I am a child. I am tempted at first to protest against this reminder as the prodigal Son did. I want to be ‘of age’, ‘emancipated,’ my own master. But then I ask myself: What is the alternative for me—or for any person—if I no longer have a Father, if I have left my state as child definitively behind me? What have I gained thereby? Am I really free? No, I am free only when there is a principle of freedom, when there is someone who loves and whose love is strong. Ultimately, then, I have no alternative but to turn back again, to say ‘Father’, and in that way to gain access to freedom by acknowledging the truth about myself.”

This is why the Catechism of the Catholic Church insists so very emphatically that “Christ’s whole earthly life—his words and deeds, his silences and sufferings, indeed his manner of being and speaking—is *Revelation* of the Father” (516). And St. Hilary of Poitiers made the observation that “the greatest work of the Son of God was to bring us to knowledge of the Father.” For those of us who are Christians, we take the claim of Jesus Christ—made the night before he died as part of his last words—very seriously. Jesus says, “I will not leave you orphans. Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:18, 9).

And *we do* see him through the encounter of human friendship that Christ has redeemed thereby making it possible, in him, for anyone to love in a fatherly way and to exercise a father’s authority. This is what Dr. Vitz referred to as “substitute fathers.” He also made the point that “all men are called to be fathers.” By that authority we mean, as Monsignor Luigi Giussani explains it, a person who—quote—“possesses a full awareness of reality, who arouses surprise, novelty, and respect.... If we meet someone who better feels and understands our experience, suffering, needs, and expectations...that person naturally constitutes authority for us... A person becomes an authority precisely because he best answers every human need.... The encounter with authority helps us to discover our nature and what we aspire to from the depths of our present poverty.... Authority generates freshness, wonder, and respect. It is attractive; it is evocative.... If authority is not fatherly, and therefore motherly, it can become a source of supreme misunderstanding, the most subtle and destructive tool in the hands of falsehood.... Authority is a face filled with greater desire which arouses greater desire in us.”

This is the face that drew that Prodigal Son back to his Father.

All of this is summed up trenchantly by Pope John Paul II in one of his plays in which he has one of his characters declare: “One must enter the radiation of fatherhood, since only there does everything become fully real.”