



What is the Meaning of Being and Having a Father?¹

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When does a newly born really have parents? To be sure, newly born babies usually find in their mother or father the immediate sources of their nourishment, their security, and their comfort in a fundamental sense. And it is common knowledge how in the glance and in smiling, true smiling during the second month of life, children discover their mothers. By this time the first habits and nourishment schedules have already been formed. Soon other customs and habits will follow. In many modern-day families the mother still has the central place in this. The father is, from the beginning, someone who is often just there. This does not mean that he is there for nothing, but that he is not there for anything—as mother is—he is just there. In the beginning the father is a pure luxury of the child's existence.² The father is not necessary to make the parenting situation complete, with him it is in a sense, over-complete. What is one to do with him? Nothing, it seems. One need not *do* anything, rather, he has things done to him. And, initially, father has nothing to do with this "being done to." He is from the beginning "on the sideline" and, therefore, "for later." Inasmuch as he is there, he counts as "belonging to mother"; he belongs to that which is extra, to that which will later be called "play," and still later probably, "the world of work." For the child, the father may not seem to be what he actually is; he seems to be something of mother's, but he has his own world.

He is the one who sometimes appears at the outer edges of time. He is a plus sign at the outer boundaries of the day. Let us hope, at least, that he is a plus and not a minus. In any case, he does not stand at the center, the center of the day, filled with those things that one needs to live. His opportunity to participate increases when the day allows more space for seemingly useless things. "Play" one calls it, "trying out," or "spontaneous activity." In the second half of the first year this space comes into existence, this oasis of freedom in a land of biological and emotional necessity. The father can take his place in this space or, even more, he can make his place in this space. He has favorable opportunities for this. In the hours of immediate care in mother's realm, father can be there, and can sow the seeds of a natural dependence. If he wastes his chances, or if he rejects them in any way, then it will become less and less natural for father to be, with mother, a part of the child's intimacy-sphere, the sphere which usually arises out of mother's immediate care. The parent who was

“pure luxury” or “over-complete,” will then fail to become experientially meaningful in the immediate prerequisite of the child’s life. In this case he will remain an outsider, and it can happen that he will be refused entry into the intimacy-sphere of “child-and-mother.” The father may become an authority figure but his authority will not be internalized by the child. The child may submit but later will resist the father. And so we encounter the classical motif of those tragedies where son murders father or father murders son out of envy. How quietly, carefully, and with warmth and dedication must the father who comes late into the life of his child take his place, and how slowly and sometimes greatly reduced is his admittance into the intimacy-sphere.

As a man, father joins this sphere with his representations of the big, distant, foreboding world; he is a reminder of its challenge. This connection of the one-who-represents-the-over-completeness, freedom and play, with the world of the future and the wide horizons, makes father particularly well suited for the introduction to matters of the intellect and of spiritual concerns. Mother stays near us until death; father stands or sits beside her, folds his hands, and we await from him the solution, the deciding word.

6 As soon as the child enlarges his or her world of free activity and the school steps in—in the name of duty and the distant world—to take his or her freedom away, then here again speaks the father principle. It speaks of “away from mother, growing up, getting to school on time, homework, marks, and getting ahead.” Then the child approaches prepuberty. The legs suddenly become long and the child wants to travel, to undertake things. In puberty and adolescence the call of the wide world and one’s own adventure truly begin to call and they shout “independence” and signify responsibility. As the child grows, the child grows into the world of the father. And conversely, the matter-of-factness and the necessity of the father’s part in the life and rearing of the child, in the guiding of the young person, becomes even greater. “To have a father” signifies having a leader, a guide into the world, into the future of life.

The child rearing situation in its primitive-naturalistic form suggests a temporary peripheral role for father. Mother suffices in the first instances as the provider and protector. From the view of the child there is, as yet, no father. But for mother he exists from the beginning, at least as provider and protector of the caring relationship of mother and child, but also in many cultures, as the one who loves mother and child. Either out of the role of provider or the role of loving caretaker, the father one day steps into the child-rearing relationship as the third member of the group. Or, he really doesn’t step into the relationship—his presence announces itself out of the role he has naturally played of being a luxury, but which the child takes as a self-evident and welcome enrichment. Father shares with mother the preproblematic position, even if he has only a casual

connection to the child's view of what is necessary in life. "Only a casual connection" means he is not a necessary part of the child's being. We know that the father provides and protects; the child, however, knows nothing of this.

The life of the child, like all human life, is conditioned by the law of cause and effect. It is, however, completed in the structure of meanings which create the "meaning world" of the person. Therefore, the step-father or the step-mother can significantly fulfill the father or mother role. It is the custom of masculinity in some cultures which keeps father at a distance, regarded indifferently, as a stranger. In the place of the true father figure there may then arise a father-as-discipliner or no father at all. The mother may meet with some misfortune, in which case, another woman takes her place. Why, in history and folktales, are there so many evil step-mothers and so few evil step-fathers? Because he is not so close to the child while she is naturally closer to the child. "Naturally" here has two significances: pure causality, and, also, "in the nature of things."

What Makes a Man a Father?

The relationship of the child to his or her mother is a unique, specific relationship. Human relationships have their individual stories but also their cultural stories. Every person has his or her relationships, but every relationship is also culturally determined.

In certain North American Indian tribes the newborn infant is kept from his or her mother for the first week and is fed a mixture of creamed cereals. If the child lives through this then the mother takes over. This has nothing to do with nature. This same tribe attempts to make the children independent very early. Perhaps we can see in this situation the demands and rigors of a primitive nomadic way of life. Mother must go on; the child must quickly become self-sufficient. The demands of life suggest a certain approach, a way of solving the problems of life. This approach, though arising out of the immediate necessities of the moment with little opportunity for reflection on the range of possibilities, becomes law. As circumstances dictate, that is the best way of doing things—that is how things are meant to be. And then some magic and religion is added and a culture arises. Other tribes follow different trains of thought and arrive at different cultures. "How does man partake of the naturally given? How does he understand it? How does he build sense-making structures on it—for protection, for consecration, out of fear and awe?" These are questions we might ask. City and country build different cultures, and even from village to village one finds great diversity. This is what Edith Clark showed in her book about Jamaica—how different family structures and marriage customs are in three villages on one island. Even the primary, specific relationship with mother is constructed differently. How much more uncertain, then, is the place of the father? Some cultures hardly address this

relationship; others treat it only superficially. We must now examine what it means when we say, "A child should have a father." A child, of course, always has a father, but now we mean that the father should be present for the child, not just as a cause of its being, but as a condition of its life. This determines our *Weltanschauung* (world view), our history, our cultural view, our view of total child development as we understand it.

8 In the Christian world the theologians try again and again to posit the essential principle of upbringing on the foundation of the God-Son relationship, or, on the foundation of God's relationship to his child—man. But, in this process one misses something. God arranged creation in such a way that children are not borne by fathers but by mothers. It seems clear that the matter-of-factness of the father-child relationship threatens to lead us away from this most evident fact. If the fundamental Christian relationship of God and Son, father and child have anything to say to us as parents, it is not only that the matter-of-factness, the creation-fact of motherhood is given, but that the fact of fatherhood is also given. Perhaps we may be permitted to say fatherhood is here seen as primary—the origin of human beings in relationships. That is why, in our culture, the primary responsibility for the child is given to fatherhood rather than to motherhood. But I say "perhaps." For it remains questionable whether it is right to posit a principle for upbringing on the basis of the God-Son, God-Father relationship. In any case, this Christian principle makes one thing evident: The father belongs, in principle, to the child. In many other conceptualizations of the world this view is not nearly as clearly given or not given at all.

The trappings of masculinity and patriarchy sometimes keep the father at a distance from his children. We find these trappings both in old and in contemporary cultures. It was usually the duty of the man to fight and to conquer or to die. At times he had to take on the responsibility of big game hunting, and as hunter fight and conquer or die. It is, therefore, understandable that there are matriarchal societies in which the women take a leading role in the system of laws and law making, and which guarantee the continuity of the race or the tribe—continuity not just in that they bear children, but in that they are determinant of family and inheritance systems, of power and of political decision making. It often seems that man's role is associated with death and the woman's role more with life. But we have said too much about this already. For naturally, as the guarantor of the safety of the mother and child, the man is not only the one who fights at the risk of his life. He is also, in the bond of mother-child-father, the representative of the living experience of security. He makes it possible for the family, in some cultures, to enjoy life without the reality of constant and immediate danger and threats. He makes it possible for mother to be vulnerable in pregnancy and birth. He, with the mother, make it possible for the child to attain

the great gift in life which consists of the fact that the child, in the child's weakness, is unaware of anything that could rob him of the courage to live. For when had a person more reason to fear for his or her life than when he or she is totally helpless? Now the child has the right to be totally helpless. The mother is allowed to dedicate herself to her child. The father stands as the protector of security in the life of the child, and more generally, he is the symbol of security.

But, naturally, in the case that there is no father, another woman or an entire group of people could guarantee safety. So it is in the woman-houses of primitive tribes, as with the Kibbutz, where a community may take the place of the father. Life goes on, says nature. To have a father who is there for one is a possible solution, though not a necessary one to the problem of security for the child's life. It is a cultural form, that is, it is something people have made out of the possibilities of life. Because it is one possibility out of a realm of possibilities, it could also be other than what it is. Where various possibilities exist one must forever choose, that is, one must acknowledge a choice of possibilities, and then take on the responsibilities of one's choosing.

Many months pass between the sexual union and birth and much can happen in this time. One can come together with others; one can "forget oneself" as we say; one can move to a new location, or one can be taken from this earth.

A mother is by nature inseparably the mother of her child. She runs away from herself, she runs from nature and the essence of womanhood if she abandons her child. The man, however, stands apart from the process of inner growth, this pregnancy. The birth completes nothing for him, even if, in the moment of birth, he again confirms this woman as wife, that is, as the one who in joy, in love, suffers for the sake of their love. To be able to choose; this freedom is given to him by nature and he can only choose consciously.

It is a choice which expresses faithfulness, out of love or out of sober reflection, or out of decency or fear, or so many grounds and lack of grounds. It is a choice of faithfulness which draws the man into the whole story of the pregnancy; a choice of faithfulness which allows the man to share in the experience. It is this choice of faithfulness which shows us not only how strongly fatherhood is related to choice, it also shows us that this choice has its foundation in the connection of life and love, and in marriage. One becomes a father not only in that one accepts responsibility for a child, but also, because one has already accepted the child, in principle, when one loves one particular woman. One wants total love, and thereto belongs, unequivocally, the child. In this love, in natural and moral grounds of this decision toward the child, is built an essence or a principle of being. These grounds are related to the realization of human growing together in love. There is no love for a woman which would a priori exclude the child. The man who a priori denies his fatherhood

in marriage finds himself married in name only.

When he decides to marry, he has already predisposed himself to being a father. But we must not forget one thing: A person can always come to new decisions. The experience of the marriage, the experience with the children, can lead to a deepened meaning of the original decision. In principle, however, we must maintain that the decision toward marriage predetermines how the man will approach his fatherly role.

Nevertheless, the central point remains that the choice and this faithfulness are thoroughly rooted in the spiritual structure of a culture, that is, in that reality which people have made and are making of this world. Where promiscuity is the custom, where the mother or the woman-house of the village takes in every expecting daughter indiscriminantly, there the father gains hardly any significance. That also means that the being of a father is a very remote possibility in the life of the man. It follows then, that to be a man one has a woman in order to secure one's masculinity, while fatherhood under certain conditions remains essentially meaningless. Nature may help in that it supports courtship and sexual communion through a system of bringing two partners together over a longer period of time and in many different circumstances. It also helps in that it makes affection possible in the midst of the cares of being. But it does not compel fatherhood. That is decided by the spirit in the culture and in the personal conscience. Just because this is so, one can lie and deceive. One can lose and dupe oneself in the superficial. Just for this reason, it is right when a society supports a man by asking him the question, "Do you know what you are doing?" For this reason unmarried fatherhood is more abominable than unmarried motherhood. Being a father depends on the standard of the Decision, the choice of life determined by a culture, or issuing out of a deep, personal love, or nourished by both these roots.

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The Meaning of Being a Father

Now that we have tried to establish how fatherhood arises out of a decision, we can consider the question of what it means to have a father. Father is a man who has decided to be true to my mother, even where there is no natural connection. In this situation, the "contents," if not the "forms," of fatherhood are given. With the multiplicity of forms we come to a different kind of empirical search, one in which we no longer look for the essence of a thing but for the numerous cloaks under which this essence hides or is hidden.

In the theories of psychology of childhood one rarely deals with the question of how the child actually encounters the primordial mother-child bond. There are obviously theories, many of psychoanalytic origin, which we will leave out of our consideration. We want to make one note here. Time and time again we notice how readily, and without reserve, the father is considered as an intimate

part of the lifeworld of the child. There seems to be a thinking based on envy related to this, as if the child now has to share his or her mother with this man; this is usually a fruitless approach, unless there is a serious disturbance in the environment of the small child. And even in the case of a child with these disturbed relations, it is questionable whether the child is not first of all disturbed in his or her primary sense of security or through some constituent defect or some other event in his or her life situation, so that accordingly every relation to every newly discovered person is essentially based on a defence and pursuit of familiarity. Our everyday experiences would seem to agree with these ideas and certainly there are psychoanalysts who hold that the father is naturally and effortlessly an original part of the child's life. And here arises the question, "When does the father first enter the life of the child?" In abnormal circumstances it happens that the child first comes to know of "father" late in life, even if he or she has been told of the father. In cases where the "rearing unity" of mother, father, and child unfolds normally there are rarely difficulties. There are authorities who hold that father enters the experienced lifeworld of the child only at the end of the first year. Others say it occurs after the second year. One should note, however, a determining factor here is how intently the father occupies himself with the child. If he begins early to play with the child, or maybe if he is, in fact, "mothering" this child (if the mother is at work, is sick, or otherwise absent), then he soon takes the place of the mother, or takes her place in part, or he becomes known as the playmate of the child. The child builds conceptions of people on two foundations at the same time. The child needs a provider as such and it needs a human contact and the emotional, sentimental contact that goes with it. And soon the child needs "others" as mediators of the world and as representatives of people in their objective properties. So the child needs a provider and it needs loving companions. Later, it needs an adult to show and explain the world, and the child needs a person in order to learn what people are like.

This last notion I would like to develop further: What it means to be the person the child sees, not only in the mother, but also in the father; what qualities and peculiarities this man possesses, these unchangeable, objective facts, the child experiences in this available person. The child does not just come to experience his or her father but comes to know the fundamental principle that people "are sometimes like this and sometimes like that." One is to accept people as they are. One learns this from the father with joy and with crying, but mostly in safety and protection. Naturally, one learns this from mother as well. But she is often more indulgent and so one remains her "mother's child" for a longer time. That is, it is often more acceptable to remain a child in the subjective sense in the presence of mother. Father, however, demands quite soon, in our culture, that

one takes control of oneself, that one behaves properly, that one is to see oneself in the eyes of others.³

The father who works away from home represents these "others" in a more objective sense than the mother who works at home; in him are present hints of the distant work-world, the world of achievement and "things" to the child, and therefore, his "area" is broader and harder than mother's. Mother's area is the nearness, the sheltered, intimate, personal world. Father's area is the distant world where people go when they grow up and where the mighty forces of adulthood do their things. Even for the girl, father's world has this meaning. But the girl (in normal development) reads her task and position as a grown-up woman, from her mother. At the same time father calls to the womanness of his daughter, in that he treats her as a woman and in that he shows her what a woman means to him as wife, mother, partner, loved one, and so forth. He gives the girl the opportunity to situate herself and to see a picture of womanness as given to her by father, and to reject it, to correct it, or to accept it. The erotically unfree father can call up an excessive eroticism in his daughter, or she can see it in a negative light and repress the erotic in herself. In this matter, the role of the mother is also most important. But this we cannot pursue here.

12 So in our culture to have a father also means, for the girl, a chance to glimpse the significance of being a woman; to be spoken to as a woman in the safe sphere of home. What the wife signifies for this man is, therefore, highly important. The girl reads from the father what it means to go through life with a man. This is, in part, determined by the culture. But, the meaning of fatherhood is not only important to the girl in its relationship to femininity. Masculinity and the significances of manliness for the woman is, in part, also experienced through the father. But, he is not the only representative of the man's world, and it may be either because of his attitude toward the child or the family, or because he is compared with other men and their attitudes and their achievements, that he can become the antithesis of the picture of manhood. There then arise in the girl feelings which strive against the father and which, in fact, may adopt those qualities which are the opposite of this prototype.

When we consider what this all means, we may well say that, in the girl's relationship to the father, a series of fundamental attitudes arise in her emotional world. In another culture these attitudes may play no role, or a different role, or may not even be acquired. The child in our culture wishes to know who his or her father is. This is apparent time and time again when the child is unclear as to who father is. The child in our culture does not live in a complete world as long as he or she is not sure about this question. How significant in this regard that there is nothing that could help us to save the child from this question, for the child will surely find it out. But, we must not draw the final conclusion, that since children develop

certain negative attitudes, or suffer mentally because their relationship to their father is hidden, concealed, or spoiled, that positive attitudes and predispositions matter-of-factly arise when the child has a father. To have a father is a highly necessary condition for the normal mental-spiritual development, but even if one has a father, one can still have much to endure. To have a father is all well and good; the father must, for his part, also *be* a father. On the one hand we speak simply of a father relation, and on the other hand we speak of a good, true father, and this father we value. To have no father is bad enough, but not to have a good father can be just as bad.

In the case of the daughter this signifies something very specific—he must first of all see the daughter as a child, and especially as *his* child in all circumstances. She will become, as a young woman, the wife of another man, and mother of the children of her husband. This means that he is to see her as the person who it is his mission to help continually make her own way into woman adulthood. To see her as *only* woman gives rise to the danger of incest, the blood-sin. In incest, first of all, the female child is suddenly pushed out of her childness; secondly, the order of the phases of life are destroyed; and thirdly, the provision of sexuality is stolen, for the girl learns somehow that either it was part of a not yet conscious part of her life or she intimates already that this event deals with a belonging, a possession which she was to spend and which was not to be taken from her. Apart from this, her father belongs to her mother. Father belongs to the reliable generation which one is supposed to be able to trust. Therefore, incest is more than just a wound, it is a disaster, a destruction, and all the more so when the generations are clearly differentiated and when there are specific understandings of normal sexual relations, and when the father has already become a specific meaning for the girl.

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Freud made the most gigantic blunder in this matter when he insisted that, without exception, every girl wishes to have a child from her father. He writes in 1919, “The wish to have a baby of the mother is the wish of every boy. . . The wish to have a child from the father is constantly with the girl” (p. 207). One cannot misunderstand Freud. The wish is never absent. The wish is constant. Of the father-daughter relationship Freud understood nothing! Even worse, he interpreted this relationship completely falsely.

A 14-year-old girl writes the following letter to me:

My mother is coming to talk to you tomorrow. Please ask her this one thing. I would like to know who my father is. She always tells me he died shortly before my birth, but this is not true. I figured it out. He was already dead a year and a half when I was born. So I would like to know who my father is. I am now living with people who feed me well but I would rather live with my father. I can't live with my mother. There is always an uncle John or even other uncles. I hate them. I would like to know who my father is so could you please ask her for me?

This is the story of many. The child is trying to recreate a whole, healthy world. One needs not just a mother, but also a father, and the child cannot see or imagine a future, a full life, without knowing about his or her father. The child will accept no substitute, no fairy tales. The child accepts only what he or she believes to be the truth. The child does not consider that it makes a difference *how* one has a father. The naked, biological father is not what the child has in mind. To have a father means to be able to locate one's own place in the world, to know where one belongs, where one is secure and is "assured of self" (*ge-sich-ert*). And because there is such a thing as true assurance, true security (for how could one be secure if security was merely an illusion), therefore one wants to know about one's true father, even if he no longer exists. Only then can one take the "second father" unto oneself. One cannot do this right away in every respect but the possibility of knowing the first one is a condition of the real bond to accepting the second one. But, this makes sense only in a culture in which "belonging" is important, in which such a position is a normal aspect of living. Here the woman is not just a possible mother of children. Rather, she is the mother of children of a husband who belongs to her. To have a father establishes that the mother had a husband, not just a producer of children. One has a father, in our culture, in the full sense, if he lives specifically for me and belongs to me. He can only do that if he *wants* to have me. If the mother tries to avoid and confuse this essential picture of belonging, then the child loses this security and this sense of being and belonging. Without a father it is now completely orphaned. The child always wanted to know the father, but now it becomes a matter of urgency. It loses all sense of proportion. The loneliness of the child, and the sense of being lost in the world, bestows on the father the image of Redeemer. Because this is so, the widow does not represent the father to the child when she tries to depict the father. Rather, she does this when her love for him and his meaning for her is transmitted to the children, not in that she bemoans his death, but in that she tries to embody the joy of his life—a difficult, impractical, and yet unavoidable task.

Responsibility

Fathers also have sons, and it seems that the birth of a son, especially the first son, is highly prized. "Yes, yes," says Freud, This is the chance for the woman to show what she can do. She can bear not just children, but a son as well! And man is the actual "image" of God. Freud was misled by the patriarchal cultures of Judaism and Christianity. There is always, as we have already pointed out, the other possibility—that the man plays a minimal role in the child rearing process and holds no definitely dominant position in society. This much is true: The woman has to carry the unavoidable

consequences and the man can go on his way. This is why we said that his first virtue should be his faithfulness. Faithfulness can only “qualify” for one who accepts the consequences of his actions. Faithfulness and responsibility belong together and it is these two virtues which the father, with only minimal help from nature, must live for his children and pass on to them—especially his sons. He may stand for security, but it is not just the mere bodily strength, the physical dominance which makes the difference. He may fight and hunt, build and provide, but this is secondary. The essential aspect here lies in the direction of continuity, of the future, and the unknown—his predictability and constancy.

In this way he ensures the continuity of the sexes. The young ones now have time to grow up, to push him aside, or to join in carrying his load—even of taking over his load. So, it is the father’s duty to the future to guide the occupation and the sense of personal responsibility of his children. He should also try to hold his fear in check when his children try to undertake something on their own, and he should try to help his wife to see this daring undertaking as a happy adventure. Therefore, he should not be envious of the young ones, like the old gods who wanted to swallow their own children. He should prize the adventures, enterprises, and undertakings of his children, and that means sometimes approving and praising, and other times calling them false, insufficient, meaningless, and worthless. He needs to know something about life, to have lived himself, to accept responsibilities, and according to the measure of his accomplishments and his abilities, to be able to accept his lot in life. Today, many fathers have no time; they also have no future and raise sons who have the greatest difficulty overcoming the childishness of a spoiled adolescence.

A world of continual tolerance, a world in which fathers fail in their duties because they have it too good and because they are always too busy—such a world leads fathers to be side-tracked into never really growing up—always playing, concerned with leisure and enjoyment, and never with responsibility. Who then assumes the responsibility? It is clear that in the end no one really wants to carry the responsibility. Such is the false existence of childish rascals, who have too much money and too few duties, commitments, and norms, that they can’t even use up all their money. And then there are those who live to please their narcissistic selves, who abdicate their responsibility for the sake of a creative life, personal fulfillment, or a great career, in which there is no time for children.

But this can be as true for the woman as for the man, for the mother as for the father. Both are people and yet in their sex differences are seen possibilities for their specific tasks, possibilities for their work differentiations and their mental attitudes. We must not over or understress this matter; not over stress because then people become merely gender creatures, not understress because then we ignore a

fact of creation and make it difficult for girls to become women and for boys to become men.

We are not dealing here with virtues, but rather with tasks and resolves for which virtues are as necessary for the father as for the mother. The tasks are differentiated, so are the possible approaches to the solutions, and so are the virtues varied according to the task, the sexes, the situation, even if one calls them by the same name; faithfulness, courage, or truthfulness. We must understand the predominant virtues in the task of the father. We expect from him the security against outside dangers such as hunger and hostile threats. We associate courage and dependability with him. He should be a person who has *decided* (who knows how to decide) where there is a need, and who dares to make a decision. We expect resoluteness from him. Also, we expect from him (and from mother) the sense of order in the great areas of life and in everyday life. The guidance in the choice of tasks and the leading to solutions we await from him.

16 The creation of an element of forbearance and mercy, into which the child has time to grow and is able to test out, determines the father's gifts and abilities. This is not brought about just by the person's love and his efforts, but also by his commonsense, his sensitivity for that which is just and right. This begins with the mother and continues with her, but is under the protection of the father. Bollnow (1968) is right when he shows how the mother gives the child the first foundations for a sense of security which make trust in life possible. One should add that the widening of this actual living and being in trust is assured by the father. His life becomes an example of actual trust. If the father fails in this task and instead makes an institution out of that which he is supposed to *be*, then he ceases to command the allegiance of his growing children. The righteousness of the law takes the place of the faithfulness of the child to his or her deepest roots. He believes, without any qualms of conscience or heart, that he will be able to work things out in a rigid Formalism which eventually leads to the tragedy of lovelessness, even in pharisee-ism. Then comes the "hardening of the heart" about which the New Testament warns. Instead of resting in security, the child is left naked in helplessness and uncertainty on the rocks of morality. Father becomes an "official." He manifests a deep unfaithfulness which covers itself with the stolen mantle of "justice."

What Are We Prepared to Do?

When one considers all this as a father, then one can only say one thing: It is impossible to be a true father. In my opinion, there is only one appropriate response to this feeling: "Of course it is impossible." It is not a natural, physical concern, not simply an effect of a cause, not a turning-to-the-child because of its needs, but rather, a matter of choice, decision, and faithfulness. Just because of this, there are

fewer good fathers than tolerably good mothers—even though, of course, true motherhood is also not purely a natural concern. The mother, too, must decide. She too can say, “It is impossible to be a true mother,” however, it is naturally easier to become a mother than for a man to become a father. A woman who does not want to become a mother runs from her nature in a more fundamental sense than is possible for a man. In the long run, she suffers the consequences of this decision more directly than a man who has made the same decision.

But we are supposed to be discussing the father and to discuss in seriousness that it may be impossible to be a true father. If Freud can say that the belief in God results from the conditions of human infancy, then we can argue and say, “No, fathers have created a picture of the Ideal for themselves.” The God of these believers is a God of the self-doubting fathers and so fathers then say, “Not I, but Him.” In this case, it would not be nice at all if women simply agreed with the faith of their men. Fathers then can go on to believe that there is a “better father” than they can be, but that He (God) is more than just the compensation for their own inadequacies. The women can simply go on and believe in this God while implicitly saying to their men, “You’re not much, my dear.”

The father stands reprimanded: He has a heavy responsibility and not the slightest possibility of eluding it. He can’t even say, “You can’t blame me. God is the only true father.” He may like to use God as an alibi instead of submitting to God’s judgment, and, chastened, to work on. Our conclusion can only be that fathers must come to a commitment, or, that fatherhood essentially demands such a commitment for which nature is of little help and from which no reference to anything in the world or to God can set the man any freer.

Here stands this father in the world. Rules and standards give him little comfort. An ordered world suits him well. He gladly hears that somewhere out there there is order, but he speaks at the same time of “dynamics,” “initiative,” “power,” “force,” “risk-taking,” and so forth. “Order” easily means the same thing to him as “dominance.” This father is the man who, at the same time, creates order and breaks through it, and in relation to this, a great moral and spiritual responsibility arises for him. How does he maintain a certain consistency in his life? As father he would like freedom, but as man he makes war; as father he would like to see order prevail, but as man he sometimes breaks through this order most selfishly, even egotistically. The father must not just want what is new, he must get it or present it in such a way that the necessary security is not disturbed. If we say of a man, he is an uncaring careerist, then we have said, in effect, that he sacrifices others to make his own way in the world. He is a beast of prey. He “eats” others in order that he may live. He calls this the “law of life” and only hopes that someone stronger does not also believe in this law. This is a very dangerous father: He either

raises another beast of prey or a very subdued person. Society should consider him antisocial. Apparently it is the task of man not to keep a balance between the father and the man in him, but to allow the mightiest of the mighty to rule and to find himself at the proper status level in the ensuing struggle. If he is a member of a society in which human relations are belittled or ambiguous, and his intuitive understanding of these relationships has been mistaken, then it is very difficult for him to fuse the father role with the man's role. He then "plays" both roles and switches back and forth each time one or the other role becomes too much for him.

18 We have a world in which it is nice to stay 16 years old as long as possible. Many succeed at this, but the next generation tends to become more infantile than the previous one. One appreciates leisure but not work; one would like the opportunity to have a child but not of raising it; one would like the money, the luxury, the comfort, the play, the sunshine, the parties, but this is supposed to fall from the heavens. Father is to give us this, but from where he is to get it is not our concern. In his place, as the original guarantor of the secure existence of the family, steps the state. The giver of all goodness abundantly comes down to us is neither the father nor the heavens. It is unnecessary to consider the "challenges of life" or what might be wrong with life. Adventures become holidays, pastimes, pranks, and sport achievements. Thank goodness war no longer represents the "big adventure" and has become simply what it always was—the human stupidity leading to the inevitably stupid solution which saps our best energies without looking over its shoulder to see what destruction and sorrow it has left behind, and what preparations it has made toward the next stupidity. Now when men come together to talk about war, they must not forget the fathers (who they are) who want freedom. The dominant cultural concept of father is overshadowed by the "natural" concept of fighters and hunters. The stone age has not yet completely ended. And yet the humanizing of the world advances slowly, and so does the meaning of fatherhood. This also means that for the mother the world becomes much more liveable, that the matters of child rearing, which are usually only the traditional concerns of women and which concern only men who are not really men, become a high concern which can be valued by fathers. Or, better, what has always been there but remained buried, or could not properly develop because of a lack of respectability, now arises and lies open, ready to be undertaken. However, it is unlikely that education can look toward a time of blossoming. Forms of discourse have been developed which place man in disembodied theoretical systems. The modern sciences sometimes seem to put man in front of an empty mirror. He looks into it and initially sees nothing—an empty hole. Just like a madman he looks into the mirror and sees nothing. Yet it is our task to give people courage to work on themselves, and at the same time, the great courage (*Mut*) which

is called humility (*Demut*), to have trust in themselves and the world.

The matter of the father comes back again. The time of the father is the period of the unassuming man; the time in which the father wants freedom and peace, and in which people bring it about; the time in which the entire form-giving power of the father flows into the formation of a meaningful world-life; the time in which the powers of destruction are turned into powers of controlled building. This will be a world in which even the weak are secure from the violations of the strong. This will be a world where mother and child find the peace and security which was always meant to be for them. This will be a world where a person can reach his or her greatest potential. If the man then looks in the mirror, he will know himself and will then turn around, face the world, and courageously begin the work while singing a song.

But we are not yet there. To the father we must still say: "The task awaits you. An enormous responsibility stands like an encircling cliff around you. The wife, the sons, the daughters need you every moment. They want a healthy world just like you do. You must lead the way, untiringly." In our time unheard of possibilities of self-development are offered. At the same time, the rear door remains open for the lazy and faint-hearted. Fathers become unsure of themselves and their tasks in this world (insofar as they are not already fleeing from themselves and their tasks). Their tasks are placed on a higher standard than before; previously, it was "work," "protection of the family against hunger and want," "duty to the state," and "the introduction to a churchly life and faith." Today all of this is much easier and we are surrounded by specialists and institutions; nice and worthy of our thanks. But it is the *living* itself we must now attempt. Wherever there is an opening, the entertainment and pastime industries now step in. The work place of fathers is such that ever more seldom does a child actually see his or her father at work, to see what actually happens at work. Work is no longer, thank goodness, a "fate," but it is now too unfamiliar, too inexperienceable for the child. In this situation the father-realm loses some of its significance. There is still the church, but even this is often seen and heard only at a distance. We can buy much, see much, try everything, and then one day, as has always been the case, die. The task—to make something out of this life—sometimes seems to be accomplished when one has reached a certain standard of wealth. And yet we know what really matters; the worth of the person. We know that neither poverty nor wealth, neither position nor office, has much to do with this. We know very well that the worth of a person has to do with that in which a person tries to transcend his or her humanness. There, man and woman meet as father and mother, and in the actual love they transcend themselves. The worth of a person lies in the great concrete unselfishness which makes our fellow human beings

vulnerable and yet strong. This strength of duty and this duty for strength in unselfishness and self-control are identical with the virtue of faithfulness.

Whoever has or has had a father encounters, in the living of the father, the security, the strength to develop for oneself the courage to dare, the courage to strive for the Good, the courage to deny oneself in favor of unselfishness and faithfulness. To have a father means to be quite personally committed through deep experiences to the promotion and defence of the vulnerable, and to the maintenance of the Essential, the noble and high principles.

To have a father also means to have encountered a "No." For whoever defends faithfulness says "No" to that which would harm it. Whoever holds to faithfulness shows it through his or her manner but also through what he or she denies. The goodness of fatherhood is essentially different from formlessness (spinelessness) and softness. This goodness arises out of his love for us and for humanity; it is not directed toward the wastrel, but to the helpless or the weaker ones, or to the loved ones. To have a father means to have come to know an ordered world and to have decided to work toward the formation of a new order.

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To have a father means to have experienced that being a man is something given by nature, but being father is based on a reordering of this givenness. Certainly there are other forms this could take, but to be a father is a high development and therefore, an enhancement of being a man. It is not an occupation like "farmer" or "teacher." It is not a hobby that one does while being a man. One is both—father and man—at the same time, but the man is secondary to the father. Certainly, a similar situation exists for the woman and the mother. The woman, however, lives as mother in the protection of her nature while manliness may revolt against fatherhood. The woman often lives in the safety of the house and the work of the family. The man usually lives in the distant world and is always challenged by its projects, and unsupported, he stands at the crossroad which easily leads to the destruction of his resolve.

Whoever defends the family or would like to defend the family because he or she believes that it was not just a whim of the Creator to have "new" people begin life helplessly entrusted to mothers and fathers, usually only thinks fleetingly of the father. Men themselves think far too little about themselves as fathers. Even those who would like to work for shorter periods of time, rarely think of the great opportunity to involve themselves through shared parenting more fully in their families—to become better fathers.

Whoever thinks of the future is possibly concerned about the power and rights of a middle-generation of youth between the ages of 15 and 22, or he or she speaks of the emancipation of women. But this person should also pay attention to fathers. Fathers, of course, have always been there. But they are encouraged in our society to

consciously reflect upon a task which challenges their complete manly nature and place it under highly ascetic goals. Man is to become a father. Of all the great projects this one deserves our attention at this time—to help men to become good fathers. We will see what happens in time. But since we help to *make* the times, we must consider the question, “What are we prepared to do?”

Notes

1. From M.J. Langeveld. (1971). *Erziehungskunde une Wirklichkeit*. Braunschweig: G. Westeman Verlag. (Original book published 1963, M. van Manen & P. Mueller, trans.)
2. Of course in many modern families the roles of mother and father have been reversed as when the father does the “mothering” while the mother works outside of the house. In other families where some kind of shared parenting exists, role sharing may occur which may (but does not always) deeply affect the traditional fathering and mothering aspects of parenting. And in other families neither the father nor the mother perform a primary parenting function; a more truly shared parenting exists; while single parent families are quite a different case again (translator’s note).
3. In this sense it is probably true that only for the very young child is a single parent relationship is sufficient as far as the primary unit is concerned (translator’s note).
4. We say, “often mother is more indulgent,” and so forth. This is not just a matter of individual preferences and variances, and there are fathers who, while at home, come to signify “free time” to the children. Then in the home father is the one who likes to be free, to play, and so on, and mother then has to become the one who keeps order. In these cases there is a shifting of the father and mother roles and the marriage roles can change. It can also happen that the disciplining role of the mother can become associated with the duty to warmly provide for the child. An analysis of this relationship might be most enlightening.

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