Evangelical and Catholic Masculinities in Two Fatherhood Ministries

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Abstract
In men’s ministries it is possible to distinguish between evangelical and Catholic masculinities: the former being more traditional, the latter somewhat ‘softer.’ This paper pursues these differing masculine performances within a discourse of fatherhood in two fatherhood ministries: Dad the Family Shepherd and Fathers for Good. On the whole, the fatherhood ministries repeat the evangelical and Catholic masculinities of regular men’s ministries via the treatment of male headship, the politics of gender and sexuality, and the use of sport as a signifier for masculinity.

Keywords
Christian masculinities, fatherhood, fatherhood ministries, men’s ministries, servant leadership

Men’s Ministries and Masculinities
During the past decade, notable progress has been made in the academic understanding of the contemporary Christian men’s movement, which this paper will further unpack via an exploration of the differing masculine performances in two men’s ministries focused on fatherhood. The Christian men’s movement—once seen as the evangelical men’s movement, synonymous with Promise Keepers— is now known to span various streams which share no common theology, spirituality or goal. The movement comprises many men’s ministries, which are groups and initiatives designed to respond in large part to a perceived crisis of masculinity within the church. The crisis can be defined by two interrelated issues:


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the low number of men who attend church relative to women, and the feminization of the church environment.

A men’s ministry may be a small entity such as a church pastor and a handful of his congregation, or it may be a large national organization with a dedicated staff which ministers to thousands of men. Men’s ministries may be denominational or ecumenical; they may address a spectrum of issues which pertain to men, or they may have a tighter focus such as the fatherhood ministries analysed below. Patrick Morley,3 Chairman and CEO of the popular ministry Man in the Mirror identifies over 34,000 men’s ministries in America alone, and this figure includes only those of an evangelical orientation.

While the perceived feminization of the Church, society and indeed men can be identified as a recurring theme among men’s ministries, the response to this theme is by no means unified. For example, the masculine performances men’s ministries encourage can differ. In particular, it is possible to identify a difference between the masculinities promoted in evangelical and Catholic men’s ministries.4 It is not possible to refer specifically to ‘evangelical masculinity’ and ‘Catholic masculinity’ within men’s ministries, as the masculine performances differ within each orientation, and there is also significant historical overlap between the two.5 However, there are some tendencies that emerge which suggest that evangelical ministries appeal to a more ‘traditional’ masculinity, whereas Catholic ministries accommodate a somewhat ‘softer’ masculinity. In particular, evangelical ministries promote a masculinity which appeals to servant leadership and militaristic and sporting imagery; Catholic ministries tend to resist these themes and encourage a masculinity founded on the sacraments, such as adoration of the saints and Mary and confession, which leads to a slightly less patriarchal masculinity.6

This paper examines how the distinction between the masculinities of evangelical and Catholic men’s ministries function within a discourse of fatherhood. Two men’s ministries with a particular focus on fatherhood are offered as a comparison: the evangelical Dad the Family Shepherd and Catholic Fathers for Good (henceforth referred to as DFS and FFG; these initials are also appended to citations of various texts connected with each ministry to aid in their positioning and identification).

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5 For example, it is tempting to think of Promise Keepers as the archetypal evangelical men’s ministry, however its founder, Bill McCartney, was a Catholic until a conversion experience when 33 years old, and his Catholic heritage encouraged the explicitly evangelical Promise Keepers to adopt a number of Catholic-friendly policies. See Aquilina M (1997) Making new Catholic men. Our Sunday Visitor, 20 July, pp. 10–11; See also Gelfer J (2009) Identifying the Catholic men’s movement. The Journal of Men’s Studies 16(1) for how Catholic men’s ministries modeled themselves upon Promise Keepers.
DFS was founded in 1984 by Dave Simmons with a mission to ‘support the local church by motivating and equipping men to live the Biblical values of fathering.’ Before founding DFS, Simmons was a linebacker in the National Football League, finishing his career with the Dallas Cowboys after which he served on the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ for more than 20 years. DFS is particularly interesting as it is part of the ‘original’ evangelical men’s ministry movement. In 1977, long before the arrival of Promise Keepers, Edwin Louis Cole established the Christian Men’s Network, and evangelical men read conservative literature such as his *Maximized Manhood*, Gordon Dalbey’s *Healing the Masculine Soul* and Gene Getz’s *The Measure of a Man*. The way DFS presents masculinity has therefore had a chance to develop over time rather than simply being a snapshot of what is happening within the contemporary debate surrounding masculinity and fatherhood. The source material from which the analysis of DFS masculinity is derived comprises the DFS website and two books written by Simmons which are described in the DFS online store as ‘classics which provide the basis for the Dad the Family Shepherd ministry’: *Dad the Family Coach* and *Dad the Family Counselor*. As a new ministry founded in 2008, FFG offers a glimpse of how Catholic masculinity and fatherhood manifests in the present day, but it also draws upon a significant historical tradition, being an initiative of the Knights of Columbus. Founded in 1882, the Knights of Columbus originally functioned as a mutual benefit society for Catholic men and their families and was intended to encourage pride in American Catholicism. It remains one of the most significant fraternal organizations in America with 1.7 million members. FFG’s mission states, ‘there is a role only a father can fill and gifts only a father can give. In a culture that often does not favor fatherhood or masculine virtue, we wish to highlight the unique contributions of men, husbands and fathers. The world would be lacking without them.’ The source material from which the analysis of FFG masculinity is derived comprises the FFG website, which includes a range of articles as

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11 http://www.kofc.org/un/about/index.cfm
12 http://www.fathersforgood.org/ffg/en/other/about.html
well as several of its *St Joseph Series Booklets* which have been compiled for FFG from existing Knights of Columbus literature.\textsuperscript{13}

A comparison of DFS and FFG provides the opportunity to assess if the unpacking of evangelical and Catholic masculinities bears further scrutiny, and if any new light is shed upon it within a context of fatherhood. A comparison of DFS and FFG provides a textual analysis which adds to a more recent turn which shows there are different ways of ‘doing fatherhood’ within specific contexts, whether in terms of ethnic experience\textsuperscript{14} or specific populations such as religious fathers, new fathers, stay-at-home fathers, teen fathers, gay fathers and older fathers.\textsuperscript{15} An analysis of the masculinities promoted in these fatherhood ministries also provides a complement to the numerous studies which focus on fatherhood and Christianity. These studies suggest that a religious orientation increases the likelihood of men being more ‘involved’ or ‘engaged’ fathers.\textsuperscript{16} In itself, this is a commendable


finding, but the context in which it is located can lead to questionable territory. For example, we are often asked to accept that the result of this Christian paternal involvement is the continued existence of ‘soft patriarchy’\(^{17}\) or ‘symbolic traditionalism’,\(^{18}\) where the father bestows his benevolence upon the family in return for a muted form of male headship. But despite the ubiquitous lament for absentee fathers, paternal involvement cannot be considered an end in itself. It is necessary to critically examine the masculinities of Christian fatherhood rather than simply celebrating their presence relative to non-Christian fathers and accepting the rather unsavory cost of soft, symbolic or some other sanitized patriarchy. This requires revisiting the politics of masculinities, something which has been rather obscured by the tide of data showing Christian fathers to be suitably involved with their families.

Analysing the way in which masculinities are presented in DFS and FFG offers a more critical interpretation of the effect evangelical and Catholic men’s ministries have on the home. First, the theme of male headship in the family is presented. Like regular men’s ministries (meaning those which appeal to men, but have no further focus such as fatherhood), evangelical masculinity in DFS is shown to be grounded in male dominance; similarly, Catholic masculinity in FFG is less concerned with male dominance. Second, the more worldly politics of gender and sexuality are canvassed which shows that both DFS and FFG promote a conservative political agenda, with little distinction between evangelical and Catholic orientation. Third, the theme of militarism and sport is presented. Like regular men’s ministries, evangelical masculinity in DFS is shown to be grounded in combative imagery; similarly, Catholic masculinity in FFG is less concerned with militarism and sport.

**Male Headship**

One theme which proliferates throughout men’s ministries is male headship of the family, or servant leadership. At the beginning of its contemporary manifestation, Edwin Louis Cole placed servant leadership at the center of men’s ministry and it is an integral part of what he describes as ‘maximized manhood’.\(^{19}\) As a theme, servant leadership gained new momentum with the rise of Promise Keepers when one of its leaders, Tony Evans, famously lamented the fact that men had abandoned their role of the head of the family. Evans tells his readers, ‘I’m not suggesting that you ask for your role back, I’m urging you to take it

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This reassertion of male dominance in the household was one of the main reasons why some critics linked Promise Keepers with a patriarchal backlash to feminism. More recently, the concept of servant leadership has been reframed in a more generous light by sociological studies analysing the effect Christianities have on fatherhood and which aim to provide a more nuanced presentation of evangelicalism. Wilcox examined a large body of data which showed that conservative Protestant fathers—such as those who follow DFS—were more involved with their families than liberal Protestant fathers and fathers with no religious affiliation. Wilcox sees conservative Protestant fathers as therefore having ‘the attributes of the iconic new man—namely, a more egalitarian division of household labor and somewhat higher levels of paternal and marital involvement and emotional engagement’. However, Wilcox makes it clear that these allegedly new men ‘still overwhelmingly endorse male headship’ but that it is ‘more symbolic than practical’, he therefore describes them as ‘soft patriarchs.’

Such symbolism is also a key theme of Gallagher and Smith whose extensive interviews with evangelical families show them to combine conservative evangelical gender ideals with the post-industrial culture in which they live. They argue, ‘the majority of evangelicals adapt the general principles of democracy to a model of family based on symbolic male authority’. Evangelical families pursue symbolic traditionalism and a pragmatic egalitarianism as a way of engaging the realities of modern life while maintaining the distinctiveness of their evangelical heritage. Gallagher and Smith describe this as a ‘“last gasp” patriarchy … confined to the inner corners of the family’.

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Wilcox and Gallagher and Smith clearly know patriarchy is an undesirable thing, as demonstrated by their need to qualify it with ‘soft’ or ‘last gasp’, however they consider patriarchy an acceptable price to pay for involved Christian fatherhood. It is possible these soft- and symbolic- prefixes are sufficient for families to escape the damaging effects of patriarchy and traditionalism, but such findings must be considered critically. Coltrane clearly spells out the danger when he suggests that narrow conservative Christian perceptions of fatherhood supported by the academic ‘evidence’ of sociologist allies is little more than ‘an attempt to reinscribe patriarchal relations in the family and … a reactionary backlash against women’s increasing autonomy’.27 Dismissing such relations, as do Gallagher and Smith, to the ‘inner corners of the family’ by no means makes them insignificant, as the family—especially within a conservative Christian worldview—is the bedrock of the nation. Any discussion of Christian fatherhood which repeats the call to male headship, symbolic or otherwise, must be considered with suspicion. Certainly, male headship is promoted in both the DFS and FFG fatherhood ministries.

The very title Dad the Family Shepherd suggests male headship. The father is the shepherd, the rest of the family his flock. Clearly when Simmons crafted this title he was alluding to the image of the shepherd which proliferates throughout scripture. However one cannot help but also read the metaphor more literally: shepherds herd sheep, which likens the wife and children to simple animals who must be corralled. Simmons has no problem with stating the role of the father in the family. Throughout his writing we read that the father is the ‘dominant male authority figure’.28 Some of the ways in which Simmons describes male headship can even become quite poetic. Speaking directly to fathers, Simmons writes:

You represent the family anchor. You are the fixed point on the x and y axis of a graph that every other family member uses for self-location. They take their bearings from you. You are the North Pole, the North Star, the fixed point that keeps everybody from flying off in every direction.29

This appears rather grand, and indeed it is. However, rather than simply a political move to assert masculine authority in the home, Simmons’ view of fatherhood has a theological foundation. Simmons is keen to point out the centrality of fatherhood in the Bible, ‘there are 1,190 biblical references to fatherhood, 365 to motherhood, and only 36 to parenthood’.30 More than this, on two significant occasions, Simmons frames fatherhood in terms of the fulfillment of prophecy.31 Simmons believes the contemporary fatherhood movement will manifest in our lifetimes the prophesy of Malachi (4.6), ‘And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their

fathers.’ Simmons says this rejuvenation of fatherhood is one of the signs indicating the return of the Messiah, or the Second Coming. As such, his statements of fatherhood resembling the North Star are less grandiose and more eschatological.

In regular men’s ministries, the evangelical concern for servant leadership was less pronounced in Catholic ministries, which tend to discuss the matter more carefully and often in terms of the parents’ mutual leadership of the family rather than the husband over both wife and children. This division is repeated with the fatherhood ministries. Certainly there are some echoes of evangelical concerns. It is interesting to note that one of the podcasts FFG hosts is of Wilcox, the advocate of soft patriarchy. In the FFG article, *Discipline for Beginners*, we are reminded that ‘within the family, the father stands before God as a priest and mediator.’ The FFG article *Men on a Mission* tells us that the father, ‘performs Christ’s kingly function as the spiritual head of his family … A father’s obligation to lead his family in holiness is not a call to domination, but to service.’ The FFG article *The Priest as Spiritual Father* performs a Wilcoxian transformation upon the meaning of patriarchy by stating, ‘we’ve lost the capacity to see that ecclesial patriarchy—or priestly “fatherhood”— is a reflection of a natural good.’ However, apart from these few examples, the mantra-like presence of male authority is not present in FFG in the way that it is in DFS. This reflects a note of caution in Catholic men’s ministry first sounded in 1996 when the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops sought to recreate the success of Promise Keepers in a Catholic context. The conference noted that Promise Keepers’ focus on servant leadership should be replaced by Pope John Paul II’s vision of the mutuality of women and men, which emphasized the mutual subjection of husband and wife, rather than only wife to the husband.

This combined force of husband and wife provides the focus for FFG. Whereas the focus of evangelical DFS masculinity was headship, the focus of Catholic FFG masculinity is marriage. For example, in the FFG booklet *Husband and Wife: A Modern Guide to Marriage* we read that, ‘the institution of marriage, and the family that results from it, is the single most indispensable foundation for happiness in all societies and in most individual lives’. The assumption of marriage is just as prevalent in DFS as FFG, but without repeated references to male headship, in FFG marriage comes to the fore. There is a departure here from regular Catholic men’s ministries which, rather than marriage, prioritize the theme of fellowship among men.

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38 For example, the hub organization, the National Fellowship of Catholic Men does not mention marriage specifically in its mission statement, ‘to offer a structure that: (1) links Catholic Men in supportive relationships, (2) provides resources consistent with Catholic teaching, and (3) develops training and formation opportunities for men’s ministry and evangelization’ http://www.catholicmensresources.org. In their analysis of the motivational factors behind...
The Politics of Gender and Sexuality

The theme of male headship is in many ways depoliticized by its biblical basis. Instead of being seen as a move to reassert power, it is framed by God’s naturally-ordained order. Even when a highly political word like ‘patriarchy’ is introduced, its potency is softened, rendered symbolic and contextualized outside worldly gender politics. However, more regular gender politics do occur in both DFS and FFG, and it is on these occasions that their conservative visions of masculinity become less ambiguous and more militant.

Simmons’ earlier theological grounding of male authority certainly does not exclude the politics of gender. Careful not to make too many anti-feminist statements himself, Simmons dedicates an entire page to the quotes of others regarding the ‘male’s plight’ which bemoans feminists who attack men and the feminization of education. Cementing the centrality of fatherhood, in Simmons’ view these aggressive feminists are themselves the result of a lack of appropriate fathering: ‘Many of the feminists who seek the destruction of the family suffer from paternal deprivation’. There is little symbolism in Simmons’ understanding of patriarchal authority: the children are subject to male authority and even the ‘mother’s attitude and worldview depends on how her husband shepherds her’. In Simmons’ view the father also ‘controls disbursements of family capital’, which is often considered a significant power tactic in marriages and known as ‘financial abuse’.

Nor does Simmons shy away from making more general comments about gender and sexuality. In particular he makes a number of homophobic statements placing DFS right of center on the political spectrum. Simmons follows a typical mythopoetic line that homosexuality is due in large part to an inappropriate handling of masculinity within society. At once homophobic and misogynistic, Simmons sees gay men—along with

‘male spirituality’ in a Catholic context, Castellini JD, Nelson WM, Barrett JJ, Nagy MS, and Quatman GL (2005) Male spirituality and the men’s movement: a factorial examination of motivations. Psychology and Theology 33(1) 41–55 discovered that ‘the factor accounting for the largest portion of the shared variances was that of Male Bonding, or relationships with other men’. 32


‘prostitutes, strippers, lesbians, and many extremist women libbers’—as a direct result of insufficient paternal involvement in childhood: ‘Most homosexual sons come from non-nuturant passive/absent fathers and overbearing mothers’; appropriate love and affection will stop a boy ‘deviat[ing] into a homosexual’ and pursuing ‘perverted liaisons with other men’. Quoting a pamphlet published by The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, Simmons repeats the conservative tactic of conflating homosexuality with society’s other perceived ills: ‘more divorce, more homosexuality, more sexual abuse, more promiscuity’. Continuing to align his theological understanding of fatherhood with more worldly politics, Simmons sees all kinds of civil decay happening in tandem with the ‘ever-creeping socialist state’.

FFG also wades through this politico-sexual mire. Landry sees ‘the push to normalize homosexual behavior’ as one of the great challenges to society, not just because it promotes same-sex attraction, but because it normalizes effeminacy which in turn challenges ‘the formation of authentically masculine men’. Toner suggests Catholics should resist being called homophobes and instead simply describe themselves as ‘pro-nature’—implying homosexuality is unnatural—and that both ‘adultery and sodomy’ are sins. Compared to DFS, FFG also widens the net in its survey of contentious issues. Landry warns against the scourge of pornography, abortion, sex outside marriage and contraception. Kreeft also argues against contraception, as the Catholic Church is for “total sex,” with nothing held back. Toner also enters into the pro-life abortion debate claiming that it, along with euthanasia and suicide is ‘murder’.

FFG also expands the discussion of sexuality further than DFS with its comments on celibacy and chastity, which function in a number of contexts with reference to


masculinity. Chiefly, masculine celibacy is celebrated by FFG in the context of the priesthood: ‘the supreme example of rightly ordered male communion.’\(^{58}\) Clearly conscious of the disproportionately high number of closeted gay men in the priesthood,\(^{59}\) Landry applauds recent ecclesiastical ‘policies against the priestly ordination of effeminate men or those with deep-seated same-sex attractions’.\(^{60}\) Celibacy or ‘chaste love’ is also celebrated through the example of St Joseph: ‘the full gift of self toward another does not necessarily have to involve genital relations’,\(^{61}\) demonstrating the possibility of celibacy even within the dynamic of marriage.\(^{62}\) FFG also gives a clear abstinence message in regard to all pre-marital interpersonal relations in response to the question ‘when should kids date?’ The half-joking answer is ‘When they’re married, and only with their spouse,’\(^{63}\) aligning FFG’s sexual politics within the discourse of the Christian Right which has used shame and fear in regard to sex and sex education as one of its key battlegrounds in the culture wars.\(^{64}\)

**Combat Themes: Militarism and Sport**

Aside from the assumption of male headship, men’s ministries tend to be built around themes of combative masculinity such as militarism and sport. Militarism (and with it an implication of violence) is one of the most undesirable and central themes of men’s ministry. Some ministries, such as Band of Brothers, Top Gun Men’s Ministries and BattleZone Ministries base their whole identity on military themes.\(^{65}\) Most other (particularly evangelical) men’s ministries trade in some way upon military metaphors and feed into the largely right-wing Christian apocalyptic imagination (in the same way as Simmons’ DFS prophetic combination of the fatherhood movement and the Rapture).

Following the regular men’s ministries, one would expect DFS to make significant employment of such military images, and FFG less so. However, our fatherhood ministries make a notable departure from the military theme. Simmons does paint the occasional military/violent picture: the mythopoetic allusion to sons being akin to the ‘tribe’s …

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62 Reassuringly, Landry tells his readers that ‘none of the men reading this booklet will be asked by God to wed a virgin pregnant with the Son of the Eternal Father’ (FFG/Landry RJ [2007] *A Man of God: A Guide for Men*. New Haven, CT: Knights of Columbus Supreme Council, 10!
young warriors’, that ‘the family is God’s smallest battle formation’ against Satan, and that a family should be seen as ‘troops’ who must be ‘fit for service’. However, apart from these few examples, DFS masculinity has been coloured by the personal experiences of Simmons. Throughout his books we read of the struggle he had for most of his life reconciling with his father—a military man—who ran his family like a military command. Simmons found this a bleak and isolating way to be raised and is determined not to make the same mistake. As such we read that ‘Dad knew troops, but kids ain’t troops’ and that ‘[Dad’s] command style was not flexible in handling the complexities of a wife, four children, and all the situations a family faces’. Indeed, more than just seeking to flee militarism, Simmons dismisses macho masculinity in general, ‘Dad’s generation, the World War II Warrior Dads, took up the strong, silent, John Wayne role. Their manly code of conduct prohibited them from showing affection to their sons’.

In the regular men’s ministries, Catholic ministries largely ignored military images. In FFG one may or may not be willing to gloss over the fact that the Knights of Columbus itself is a militaristic image. We also read that one ‘way to illustrate the virtues of a real man of God is by reference to a good soldier’, that ‘sometimes I need to be a special-ops dad,’ and, with the added dimension of nationhood, of ‘good husbands and fathers, true knights for God and country.’ But apart from these few examples, in general FFG follows the Catholic lead of men’s ministry and ignores military themes.

The gap left by militarism in DFS masculinity is filled by that other normative masculine theme of sport. Like militarism, in the regular evangelical men’s ministries sport was an overarching theme, but less so in the Catholic ministries. Given that Simmons is an ex-NFL athlete and advocate for Campus Crusade for Christ, it is hardly surprising that sport plays such a central role in DFS masculinity. From the title, *Dad the Family Coach* onwards DFS literature is saturated with sporting imagery. The literature physically resembles a playbook, starting with ‘coaching tips’ and a ‘scouting report,’ each chapter is punctuated by an ‘e-team huddle guide’ complete with review, discussion, workout and the concluding command (in capitals) of ‘BREAK THE HUDDLE, GO HOME AND RUN THE PLAY!’

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75 While Simmons centralizes sport, there are some exceptions. For example, he states, ‘if your child displays a high interest in music, you should encourage music lessons and opportunities to attend recitals: Don’t make life wretched for a son by kicking him out onto the football field’ (DFS/Simmons D (1991) *Dad the Family Counselor*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 71).
The function of sport, and in particular the connection with Campus Crusade for Christ should not be underestimated in regard to the formation of DFS masculinity. Ladd and Mathisen locate Campus Crusade for Christ among a host of sports ministries founded in the 1950s which comprise what they define as a second wave of Muscular Christianity, the first of which flourished in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This second wave of evangelical sporting ministries are conservative in nature which manifests a particular type of masculinity that resonates with sexual puritanism, homophobia, militarism, the destruction of the body and open alignment with notorious right-wing campaigners. By operating on college campuses, sports ministries have an early entry into the shaping of young people (men), and socialize them to accept orthodox and conservative values. In this respect, Simmons’ transition from Campus Crusade for Christ to DFS reflects the typical transition of a young man on campus to father, and brings with it that same conservative construction of masculinity. In men’s ministry, and DFS specifically, sport functions as a proxy for militarism, as the intersection of masculinity and sport is populated largely by power and violence.

Like militarism, Catholic men’s ministries tend to shy away from sport as a theme to define Catholic masculinity. In FFG we read that masculine perceptions of spirituality can be ‘like a golfer concentrating on keeping his head down, bending his right knee, cocking his wrists, following through but forgetting that the object of the game is to hit the ball onto the green and into the cup.’ We also read of a ‘push toward effeminacy’ in sports (and academics!) which has resulted in a loss of focus on goals and winning in favour of all competitors’ self-esteem. But apart from these few examples, in general FFG does not engage in sports as a way of defining masculinity and fatherhood. Indeed, Landry also notes that, ‘professional sports figures often leave men and boys empty of genuine role models’.

Simmons also opts for less combative/competitive imagery when suggesting a father should consider himself as ‘a gardener who can reinforce positive growth’, see DFS/Simmons D (1991) Dad the Family Counselor. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 72.

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Conclusion

Men’s ministries are initiatives which are concerned with the feminization of the Church and which seek to reassert the position of men at the heart of Christianity. This task is undertaken not just by prioritizing men in Christian lifestyles, but by (re)constructing particular Christian masculinities. In regular evangelical men’s ministries this tends to result in a ‘traditional’ masculinity based on dominance in the family and combative imagery. In regular Catholic men’s ministries this tends to result in a ‘softer’ masculinity which accepts slightly more diverse masculine performances than its evangelical counterpart.

In the specific context of fatherhood ministries, the role of male headship is repeated in DFS in the same way as regular evangelical men’s ministries: Simmons unambiguously asserts throughout his literature the need for a ‘dominant male authority figure.’ Similarly, just as male headship is given little priority in regular Catholic men’s ministries, so too in FFG. The lack of interest in servant leadership in Catholicism can be seen to reflect a historical ambivalence towards the family. Ruether shows how until the Reformation, Christianity was almost anti-family, opting instead for ‘a new eschatological family that negates the natural family’.84 If the family is not necessarily privileged as a way of living, then neither is the male authority role it can contain. Similarly, in their survey of more recent American Christian families, Browning et al. show that Protestant styles of worship are centered around the home with the father acting as the priestly figure, whereas Catholic worship is more focused on the mass, where the father is removed as the direct intermediary between the family and God.85 It should then come as no surprise that FFG fatherhood places less stress on the importance of the dominant male authority figure.

However, while there are differences between DFS and FFG in regard to male headship, they are aligned with their privileging of marriage as the assumed site of fatherhood. Of course this is hardly surprising given that the focus of both these ministries is fatherhood and there is a general aspiration in Christianity that children are born in wedlock. However, the husband–father role is not the only way Christian men experience fatherhood, nor are families defined solely by marriages. Cahill argues, ‘the ideals of Christian family life should focus more on function … than on regularity or form’.86 Browning et al. write of critical familialism, which requires more than the simple presence of soft-patriarchal symbolic-traditionalist ‘involved’ fathers and demands an analysis of the power relations in the family (the politics of masculinity, in the present context). Critical familialism must also acknowledge, ‘families of single parents, stepparents, adults called to a vocation of singleness, and gays and lesbians raising children’.87

In terms of critical familism, DFS fails to deliver: it assumes a nuclear family and that anything else is defective. This leaves the many evangelical men who experience fatherhood outside of the traditional family unit with no place to turn in their quest for improved fathering skills, and the inevitable assumption that their fatherhood–masculinity is in some way dysfunctional. To a large degree FFG also fails to deliver, but we are given some glimpses of different forms of family. In the FFG article *Be There. Be Yourself* the reality that the nuclear family may not be sustainable does exist: ‘Being a good dad is certainly possible both inside and outside of marriage. Regardless of whether you and their mom can work out how to be a committed couple, you can support each other as parents.’ The FFG article *Why Fathers Count* claims the benefit of father involvement is ‘true for fathers in biological parent families, for stepfathers, and for fathers heading single-parent families.’ While such statements are hardly ringing endorsements of atypical fatherhood masculinities (such as gay dads), it does at least open up some vision of the family beyond the nuclear unit. Whether this acknowledgement in FFG of non-traditional families is another example of Catholic ambivalence is hard to say, but it is there in a way that is not in DFS.

In regular men’s ministries, evangelical masculinity is also defined largely by military and sporting imagery which assumes combat to be a signifier of masculinity. In DFS the military imagery is mostly absent due to Simmons’ negative experiences with his military father, but combative masculinity is maintained by the centrality of sport. A combative evangelical masculinity is also promoted via Simmons’ open attacks on what he perceives to be ‘extremist women libbers’ (equating, it appears, extremism with questioning the assumption of male dominance in the family). DFS masculinity can therefore be seen as a repetition of wider evangelical men’s ministry masculinity. In regular men’s ministries, Catholic masculinity puts less emphasis on military and sporting imagery, and this too is repeated in FFG. However, the graphic vocabulary of FFG surrounding issues such as homosexuality and abortion is itself combative. This militant political stance problematizes the conclusion derived from regular men’s ministries that Catholic masculinity is ‘softer’ than evangelical masculinity, even if it accommodates a broader understanding of the family.

Finally, it is also important to identify the fundamental theme of DFS and FFG. While they are both ‘fatherhood ministries’ and ostensibly provide further examples of the increasingly numerous different sites of fatherhood the fundamental theme is not necessarily Christian fatherhood, rather Christian men. DFS and FFG are, in the end, men’s ministries whose main aim is to reassert the position of men within Christianity. As such it is prudent to question what we actually learn about Christian fatherhood from these ministries. There are useful frameworks for analysing the dynamics of Christian fatherhood, such as Browning et al.’s critical familism, or Wall’s childism which ‘prioritize[s] the meaning and point of view of childhood’. But note, both these

frameworks decentralize the father: they look either at the power dynamics of the whole family, or through the eyes of the child. In men’s ministries, men are the point of focus, the ‘North Star’; in DFS and FFG fatherhood is co-opted in this process.

It is clear, then, that a textual analysis of these two fatherhood ministries replicates many of the themes and distinctions identified in men’s ministries with a broader focus. DFS, as an evangelical men’s ministry, assumes men hold the seat of power within the home, appeals to combative themes (albeit in terms of sport rather than militarism) and takes a centre-right position in the politics of gender. FFG, as a Catholic men’s ministry, is more cautious about power in the home and appeals less to combative themes; however, in partial contra-distinction to Catholic men’s ministries with a broader focus, FFG takes a more explicit centre-right position in the politics of gender. These themes and distinctions provide further evidence of the diversity of the Christian men’s movement, and of the masculine performances to be found within it.

References


