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The Fatherhood of the Priest

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THE FATHERHOOD OF THE PRIEST



THERE is a growing curiosity in the world today concerning the reason why the Catholic priest is called father. There are many outside the Church who vehemently deny the priest's claim to fatherhood, whereas many of the faithful, while they readily assent to the paternity of the priest, are unable to offer any solid arguments in favor of their position. The principal reason why both Catholics and non-Catholics cannot understand the reason for regarding the priest as a father is because they fail to understand the notion of fatherhood. Some have gone so far as to maintain that fatherhood is a relation to be found in God alone; and these object to the application of the term to others in view of the words of Christ, "Call none your father upon earth; for one is your father, who is in heaven."¹ This objection, of course, totally disregards the context in which Christ's words were spoken. Our divine Lord does not restrict paternity to God the Father,

¹ *Matt.*, xxiii, 9.

although, as we shall see in the course of these pages, it is God alone Who is Father in the fullest sense of the word, and the term is applied to others only in so far as they participate in His paternity. Others are under the impression that fatherhood is the relation of the principle of generation in only natural created beings. This materialistic concept rules out not only the fatherhood of the priest, but that of God as well.

An understanding of the solution to this problem has great practical importance, for the relations between priest and people are, to a great extent, determined by whether or not the priest recognizes the faithful as his children, and the faithful in turn regard the priest as their father. The recognition of this mutual relationship will result not only in a more zealous, understanding priesthood, but also in a more enlightened, militant laity. When the priests see in the faithful their own spiritual children whom they must nourish, protect and instruct in the supernatural life, they cannot but be inspired with a more loving, all-embracing solicitude for the problems of their subjects. When this paternal solicitude is manifested in the daily life of the priest, there will arise a bond of the utmost confidence between him and the faithful which will induce them to bring all their difficulties to him as a child to his father; they will ever be running to the priest for that nourishment, encouragement and guidance which are so necessary for existence in the spiritual life. When, as today, however, priests and people lose consciousness of their respective relationships of fathers and children, the closest bond of mutual confidence between the priesthood and the faithful is thereby relaxed and a distance and diffidence often grows up instead.²

Besides the practical importance of this question, it is of great theoretical value in as much as its solution implies an investigation of the most fundamental theological problems together with their intimate relations among one another. In order to understand the priest's claims to fatherhood it is neces-

² Cf. H. E. Manning, *The Eternal Priesthood* (The Newman Bookshop, Westminster, Md.: 1944); pp. 22-23.

sary to be acquainted with the Church's teachings on such important doctrines as the Trinity, the Incarnation, the efficacy of Christ's Passion, grace and its communication through the sacraments, and especially on the Christian priesthood. Moreover, a knowledge of the important philosophical concept of analogy is of the utmost necessity.

The precise end we have in view in writing this article is to show that the priest is truly and formally a father. We are not concerned here with the priest's non-formal claims to fatherhood, first of all because these are multitudinous and hence could not be adequately treated in so brief a study, but more especially because such claims are of relatively minor importance once the priest's formal claims to fatherhood have been established.

As far as we have been able to ascertain, very little has been written previously on this subject. It is true that some of the Fathers of the Church, such as St. John Chrysostom, have, in passing, alluded to the priest's claim to paternity by reason of his sacramental ministry. But there seems to be no *ex-professo* treatment of the subject, certainly not in English.

The method we shall follow is theological. We shall attempt to draw from principles of faith a theological argument which demonstrates the priest's formal claims to paternity. First of all, we shall examine the concept of fatherhood, then show how Christ participates most intimately in the fatherhood of God. We shall then proceed to show that Christ is a father by reason of His priesthood. From this fact follows the logical conclusion that since the priest shares in the priesthood of Christ, he, by that very fact, participates in the divine paternity.

I. THE NOTION OF FATHERHOOD

Of the origin of the word "father" very little is known for certain. The word has the aspect of an agent noun in "fater" and "father." It is doubtfully referred to by some as a cognate of the Sanskrit root $\overline{\text{PA}}$, meaning "protect" or "keep." Thus in Latin we have the verb *pascere*, whence are derived the

words "pastor" and "pasture." Possibly the word is taken from the Anglo-Saxon *fēdan*, meaning "to feed," which has the form *feden* in Middle English. In modern English this becomes "feed." Whatever the origin of the word "father," it is one of the terms of intimate relation which occurs with slight changes of form in nearly all the Aryan and Indo-European tongues.³

Strictly speaking, a father is the proper active principle of generation in perfect living beings, while "fatherhood is the relation of the principle of generation in perfect living beings."⁴ Relation is the name given the order that exists between two things, which two things are in some way referred to one another. In every relation we can distinguish the principle or subject which is referred to, the term to which the subject is referred, and the reason for the reference. This latter is called the foundation of the relation. We have a clear example of a relation in teaching; the teacher is the subject of the relation, while its term is the pupil, the foundation of the relation being the act of teaching.⁵

Generation, in its wider sense, is nothing more than a change from non-existence to existence.⁶ However, we are concerned here with the strict meaning of generation which signifies the origin of any living being from a conjoined living principle by way of a similitude of nature in the same species.⁷ Three things, therefore, are required in order that there be a true generation. First, both the generator and the being generated must be living. Consequently, perspiration and such things, although they have their origin within a living body, are not properly said to be generated. Secondly, it is required that the generator be conjoined, that is, he must produce the generated being from his own substance. Hence the first man cannot be said to have been generated in the strict sense because God did not produce

³ Cf. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, V, 351; also *The Century Dictionary*, III, 2153.

⁴ *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 28, a. 4.

⁵ Cf. *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 28, aa. 1, 2; also Aristotle, *Metaph.*, V, 15.

⁶ . . . communiter . . . generatio nihil aliud est quam mutatio de non esse ad esse (*Summa Theol.*, I, q. 27, a. 2).

⁷ *Ibid.*

him from His own substance, but formed him from the slime of the earth.⁸ Thirdly, it is required that the one generated proceed from the generator by way of a similitude of nature, and not only by way of generic similitude, but there must be a procession by way of similitude in the same specific nature.⁹ This definition of generation is verified only in perfect living beings in as much as only perfect living beings proceed from a conjoined living principle by way of similitude in the same specific nature. The principle of a true generation is called a father,¹⁰ the term being the son, while the relation of the father to the son is fatherhood.

We refer to the subject of this relation as principle, rather than cause, advisedly. "The word principle signifies only that whence another proceeds."¹¹ But the ". . . term cause seems to mean diversity of substance, and dependence of one from another. . . ." ¹² The necessity of the use of the word principle rather than cause will be evident as we proceed, particularly in our consideration of fatherhood within the Godhead, in which there is a procession from, but no dependence upon, the principle of generation.

A father is said to be the proper active generative principle inasmuch as in some imperfect generations, such as human generation, there is required a duality of principles, the one active, the other passive. The proper active principle in such cases is the father, while the maternal principle, although endowed with a certain limited activity, is properly said to be passive.¹³

⁸ *Gen.*, iii, 7.

⁹ Cf. *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 27, a. 2; III, q. 28, a. 1, ad 4um; I, q. 100, a. 1; I-II, q. 81, a. 2; also P. M. Gazzaniga, *Praelectiones Theologicae*, Tom. III, Dissert. II, Cap. III; also J. Gonzalez, *Com. in I part. D. Thomae*, Tom. II, Disputatio II, Sect. I.

¹⁰ Cf. *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 32, a. 2; q. 40, a. 2.

¹¹ *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 33, a. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, ad 1um . . .

¹³ Cf. *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 92, a. 1. The recent theory concerning an equality of active principles in generation is no longer tenable in the light of modern physiological findings. It is now generally admitted by competent scientists that not only

It must be noted that generation is a natural process, and that nature intends as the term of the generation not only the production of a being, but also the production of a being in its perfection.¹⁴ Consequently, when a being which has not yet reached its perfection results from the essential act of generation, nature demands that the generating process continue until the being attains its perfection. This means that the education and discipline of the offspring and all that these imply, such as nourishment and protection, are related to generation as integral parts.¹⁵

Types of Fatherhood

We can distinguish five various types of fatherhood, namely: 1) divine fatherhood within the Godhead; 2) fatherhood of divine adoption; 3) God's fatherhood of natural creatures; 4) human fatherhood; and 5) the fatherhood of human adoption.

(1). Within the very Godhead Itself is to be found fatherhood in its fullness, which is the archetype of all other paternity and of which all fatherhood is but a participation. Thus St. Paul speaks of this fatherhood as that from which "all paternity in heaven and earth is named."¹⁶ God is a Father because He truly generates a Son. By an examination of the mystery of the Holy Trinity we shall see that the relation of the First Person to the Second Person is that of fatherhood in the fullest sense of the word.¹⁷

The procession of the Divine Word from God the Father is a true generation because the Word proceeds by way of intellectual action, which is a vital operation. He proceeds from a conjoined living principle because He receives the very nature

is the father the proper active principle in as much as the spermatozoon actively penetrates the ovum, but also because of the established fact that the spermatozoon is gifted with extraordinary powers of locomotion while the ovum is relatively immobile.

¹⁴ Cf. *Summa Theol.*, Suppl., q. 41, a. 1.

¹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 102, a. 1; Suppl., q. 41, a. 1.

¹⁶ *Ephes.*, iii, 15.

¹⁷ Cf. *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 27, a. 2.

of the First Person of the Trinity. He proceeds by way of similitude¹⁸ in as much as the concept of the intellect is a likeness of the object conceived. He proceeds in the same nature because in God the act of understanding and His existence are the same.¹⁹ All fatherhood, whether it be in heaven or on earth, is derived from this divine paternity within the Godhead. All other types of fatherhood are but participations of this true and perfect paternity of God by which the Father gives the Son His whole nature.²⁰

“The terms ‘generation’ and ‘paternity,’” says St. Thomas, “like the other terms properly applied to God, are said of God before creatures as regards the thing signified, but not as regards the mode of signification. Hence also the Apostle says, ‘I bend my knee to the Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all paternity in heaven and on earth is named.’ This is explained thus. It is manifest that generation receives its species from the term which is the form of the thing generated; and the nearer it is to the form of the generator, the truer and more perfect is the generation; as univocal generation is more perfect than non-univocal, for it belongs to the essence of a generator to generate what is like itself in form. Hence the very fact that in the divine generation the form of the Begetter and Begotten is numerically the same, whereas in creatures it is not numerically, but only specifically, the same, shows that generation, and consequently paternity, is applied to God before creatures.”²¹

(2). That fatherhood which approaches more closely than all other types to true and perfect paternity is the adoptive fatherhood of God, by which He communicates His divine nature to creatures. God is not the natural father of the creature to whom He thus communicates His nature, for the divine nature is in no way due to creatures. Thus this type of fatherhood is called one of adoption; for it is by adoption that one takes a stranger as his own heir and child.²² By the fatherhood

¹⁸ Cf. *Coloss.*, i, 15.

¹⁹ Cf. *Summa Theol.*, loc. cit.

²⁰ Cf. St. Thom., *In Epist. S. Pauli ad Ephesios*, Cap. III, lect. 4.

²¹ *Summa Theol.*, q. 33, a. 2, ad 4um.

²² Cf. *Ibid.*, III, q. 23, a. 1.

of divine adoption men become the heirs and sons of God. The charter of this adoption is to be found in the Gospel of St. John, in the Synoptics, and in the Epistles of Sts. Paul, John, Peter, and James.²³ According to their teaching, men are begotten, born of God. God is the Father of men because He is the principle of a new life in them, a supernatural life, a life of grace. This fatherhood is not a natural one, for the new life which men receive is in no way due to them by nature.²⁴ Yet, as we shall see, it differs greatly from human adoptive fatherhood, for it adds inestimably to man's intrinsic worth. Indeed, it has the primary formal nature of fatherhood; here there is a true generation, true new life, and it is God Who is the principle of this new life. There is even a certain participation of nature, for we become the adopted children of God.²⁵

Men can never by their own merits become sons of God.²⁶ Consequently, this fatherhood of divine adoption is something which is entirely gratuitous. Moreover, it infinitely surpasses human adoption "for as much as God, by bestowing His grace, makes man whom He adopts worthy to receive the heavenly inheritance; whereas man does not make him whom he adopts worthy (to be adopted), but rather in adopting him he chooses one who is already worthy."²⁷ Indeed, this adoptive fatherhood is perfect, for by it the "creature is likened to the Eternal Word, as to the oneness of the Word with the Father . . . and this likeness perfects the adoption; for those who are thus like Him the eternal inheritance is due."²⁸ Thus this type of fatherhood approaches more closely than all other types the divine natural fatherhood, from which "all paternity in heaven and earth is named."²⁹

(3). Considering the relation of God to those of His creatures whom He has not endowed with His sanctifying grace, we again

²³ *John*, i, 12, 13; *Matt.*, v, 9, 44, 45; *Luke*, xx, 35, 36; *Rom.*, viii, 14-16; *Ephes.*, i, 5 ff.; *Gal.*, iv, 4-7; *I John*, i, 3; *I Peter*, i; *I James*, i, 18.

²⁴ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 112, a. 1; q. 114, aa. 2, 5.

²⁵ *II Peter*, i, 4.

²⁶ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 112, a. 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, ad 3um.

²⁷ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 23, a. 1.

²⁹ *Ephes.*, iii, 15.

find the notion of fatherhood verified in God. This, however, will not be perfect fatherhood, for, as has been said, paternity, in the strictest sense of the word, is to be found only within the Godhead. But this divine paternity is reflected in God's relationships with His creatures, and in other ways, as we shall see. Between God and natural creatures we do not find the relations of true paternity and filiation, first of all, because the act by which creatures proceed from God is not, properly speaking, a generative one, but rather a creative one. Moreover, God does not produce creatures by way of a similitude of His nature, but by way of a similitude of His essence, divine nature implies divine operation, and the only instances of creatures who operate in a divine manner are those who are gifted with God's grace.³⁰ So while natural creatures participate in the essence of God, they do not partake of God's nature. Then, too, natural creatures do not proceed from God as from a conjoined living principle because God produces them from nothing and there is no medium between the Creator and the being created.

However, God may be said to be the Father of natural creatures because, as the principle of their being, He produces them in a certain likeness of His essence.³¹ This likeness will be more perfect as we approach nearer to the true relations of fatherhood and sonship. Thus God is called the Father of some creatures by reason only of vestige, as in the case of irrational animals.³² Of the rational creature, God is Father by reason of the likeness of His image.³³ Thus we read in the Book of Deuteronomy: "Is he not thy father, that hath possessed thee, and made thee, and created thee?"³⁴ But God is not only the principle of the being of natural creatures; He is also the director and governor of their being in as much as the production of being is not the ultimate end of the divine action, but is or-

³⁰ Cf. *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 110, aa. 3, 4; q. 112, a. 1; q. 113, a. 9; q. 114, a. 8; II-II, q. 19, a. 7.

³¹ *Ibid.*, I, q. 57, a. 2, ad 2um.

³² *Ibid.*, I, q. 45, a. 7; q. 33, a. 3; q. 93, a. 6.

³³ *Ibid.*, I, q. 45, a. 7; q. 33, a. 3; q. 93, a. 2.

³⁴ *Deuteronomy*, xxxii, 6.

daigned to a higher end. Creatures, however, of themselves, are incapable of knowing and attaining this end, and so it is necessary that God conduct them to it. In this sense He may be said to be their Father; "for it belongs to a father to beget and to govern."³⁵ Thus while God may be rightly called the Father of natural creatures, He is not formally a father in this sense in as much as the formal notes of fatherhood are lacking in His production of such creatures.

(4). Among men we find a relation of paternity, that of human fatherhood, which is but a shadow of the divine paternity. But it is fatherhood precisely because it is a reflection, a participation, however weak, of the divine paternity within the Godhead. The term fatherhood, therefore, is applied to creatures in an analogical sense in comparison with its application to God.³⁶ Unlike the relationship that exists between the first and second Persons of the Blessed Trinity, the nature of the begetter and begotten in human generation is not numerically, but only specifically, the same.³⁷ Human fatherhood is but a reflection of divine paternity because human generation is far less perfect. This deficiency is found not only in the principles of human generation, but also in the human generative act. While God enters in to supply the form in human production, His action in this instance is not properly generative, but rather creative, in as much as He produces the human soul out of nothing. It is the secondary principles in human production who place the specifically generative act. God gives the motion that results in the generative act, and it is for this reason, as well as because of the fact that he supplies the form for the resultant being, that He can be called the father of the natural man. However, His paternity here is but a faint reflection of the plenitude of His fatherhood; the being that is produced as a result of His action and that of the human parents, who are the secondary principles in human production, receives the specific

³⁵ *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 81, a. 3.

³⁶ Cf. *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 3, a. 6, ad 1um.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, I, q. 33, a. 2, ad 4um.

nature not of the primary principle of its production, but rather of the secondary principle.

Unlike the divine generation within the Godhead, human generation is fraught with many imperfections. First of all, the principles of human generation are imperfect, and they are imperfect precisely because they are material and multiple. Moreover, the generative act is imperfect, because in man, who is finite, it is temporal. This means that not only does man have to wait until he reaches a certain stage of development before he can place the generative act, but, once he has placed that act a period of time must elapse before the completion of the process of generation. Moreover, when essential generation has taken place, the being is far from having reached its perfection. The child at generation and for a long time after birth is incapable of maintaining its own existence. Consequently, closely bound up and included in the idea of human generation is the notion of education, which includes the nourishment, protection, instruction, and training of the child. These notions are inseparable from the concept of human generation, "for nature intends not only the begetting of offspring, but also its education and development until it reach the perfect state of man as man . . ." ³⁸ It is for this reason that St. Thomas says that a father is the principle not only of generation, but also "of education, of learning and of whatever pertains to the perfection of human life." ³⁹

It is the function of the human father, then, not only to generate, but also to nourish, to protect, to instruct, and to train his children. Indeed, in every generation which is not perfect (and there is only the one perfect generation) some or all of these functions will be necessary, depending on the nature of the being generated.

The proper active principle of human generation is, then, truly a father, for from his own living substance there proceeds a new living being of the same specific nature. And the precise reason that the proper active principle of human generation is

³⁸ *Summa Theol.*, Suppl. q. 41, a. 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 102, a. 1.

called a father is the fact that he partakes of the plenitude of fatherhood "from whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named."⁴⁰

(5). Men participate in the divine paternity in yet another way when they assume as their own children and heirs those whom they have not generated. Since one who partakes of this type of fatherhood is not the principle whence the life of the child proceeds, he is not said to be the natural father of the child; his fatherhood is one of adoption. Thus paternity of this type does not partake of the intrinsic formal nature of paternity. Consequently, in human adoption, the father adds nothing to the intrinsic worth of his adopted child. However, such a father does have a claim to paternity in as much as, in lieu of the principle of the child's generation, he brings this generation to its integral perfection by performing the secondary functions of a father. As we have seen, these latter functions, although extrinsic, partake of the integral nature of fatherhood. So, although this type of paternity is far less perfect than any we have yet considered, it does, nevertheless, merit the name of fatherhood.

A clear notion of the different types of fatherhood and their relative importance may be had from the following illustration showing the various degrees of paternity in relation to the divine paternity, which is in the Godhead.

II. THE FATHERHOOD OF CHRIST

As we have seen, one is a father formally, in as much as he participates in the divine fatherhood of God the Father from "whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named."⁴¹ He Who participates more fully than all others in this divine principality of the Father is His divine Son, Jesus Christ. Christ is a father because He generates men into a new life. He begets new creatures who participate in His own nature⁴² much more intimately than men, by human generation, share in the nature

⁴⁰ *Ephes.*, iii, 15.

⁴¹ *Ephes.*, iii, 15.

⁴² *II Peter*, i, 4.

of their natural fathers. Christ is the principle of man's participation in the divine nature in as much as, through his human nature, He merited this gift for men through His Passion, and in as much as He efficiently communicates it to them through the sacraments.⁴³

THE PLENITUDE OF DIVINE PATERNITY
WITHIN THE GODHEAD

True generation by way of an
identity of nature.

FATHERHOOD OF DIVINE ADOPTION

True generation
by way of a
participation
of nature

Formal Paternity.

HUMAN FATHERHOOD

True generation by way of a
similitude of nature.

Formal Paternity.

GOD'S FATHERHOOD OF NATURAL
CREATURES

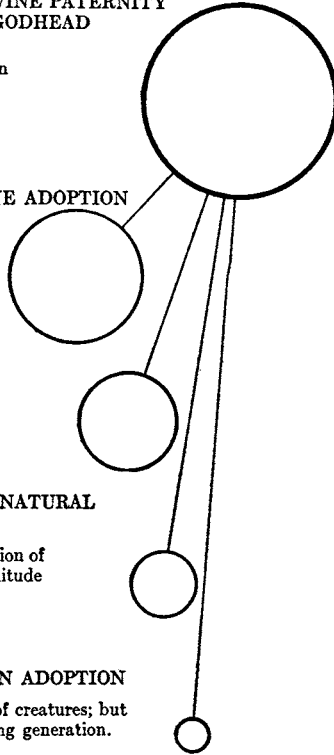
No generation, but the procession of
living beings by way of a similitude
of God's essence.

Non-formal paternity.

FATHERHOOD OF HUMAN ADOPTION

No generation, no procession of creatures; but
the external principle perfecting generation.

Non-formal paternity.



Christ's fatherhood of men became a necessity with the loss of supernatural life by the first father of men. Adam, by his sin, forfeited participation in the divine life not only for himself but also for all his descendants. God had decreed, however, that man's participation in the divine life should be restored. Moreover, He had determined the manner in which this restoration

⁴³ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 64, a. 3.

was to be effected. The sons of Adam were not to be born into this world in a supernatural state, but God had ordained that men already born should be "reborn in a new manner so as to die according to the first birth and live according to the second."⁴⁴ Sacred Scripture assures us of the necessity of this new birth in order that men may participate in the divine nature. As the foundation of this doctrine we have the words of Christ to Nicodemus, "Unless a man be born from on high, he cannot see the kingdom of God."⁴⁵ The very idea of birth implies a son or children who are generated and a father who generates. Therefore, in order that men may have life in God, is it necessary that they have a father to generate them into this new life.

Just as Adam is the father of the human race in so far as he virtually contained as sons all men who were to proceed from him as from a principle, so, too, Christ, the second Adam, is the new Father of men in as much as by His passion He merited for all men a participation in the divine nature. Indeed, Christ is in a much truer sense the Father of men in as much as He gives them spiritual life, a participation in the very life of God, whereas Adam bequeaths to them only passing, human life in a corrupted human nature, which, because of its corruptibility is incompatible with the eternal life. It is for this reason that as sons of Adam we must die, but as sons of Christ we have eternal life.

Christ is not only the second Adam; He is also the "last Adam," for "there is no other name under heaven given to men,

⁴⁴ Fray Luis de Leon, *The Names of Christ* (New York: 1926), p. 46.

⁴⁵ *John*, iii, 3. Note:—The Greek text has "gennethe anothēn" which may mean: "born again"; "born anew"; or "born from on high." Some of the Fathers and Doctors, St. Thomas among them, prefer "born from on high," and there is little doubt that this is the correct signification. The context in 3:31 shows that this is the true meaning. It is not the fact of a rebirth that is emphasized but the spiritual quality of the rebirth. The sense of the passage is: spiritual rebirth is the first requisite for entry into the kingdom of heaven, which, contrary to the general expectation, is here asserted to be a spiritual kingdom. Cf. M. J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Jean* (Paris: 1936), p. 74.

whereby we must be saved.”⁴⁶ There is no other father to be expected who can free men from the deadly effects transmitted through their generation by the first Adam, and can give them a new life, a new nature, which is a participation in the divine nature. What Adam would have bequeathed to his sons, had he remained faithful, was lost by his sin; and, as a consequence, his sons are born in a nature that bears the deadly effects of his sin. Christ’s sons, however, participate in the all-perfect nature of God Himself. Therefore, Christ’s fatherhood exceeds Adam’s as the divine and perfect exceeds the human and corrupt, as unsullied supernature exceeds corrupted nature. The comparison of the two Fathers of men and of the inheritances left their respective sons, as given by St. Paul in the fifth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, shows the infinite superiority of Christ as the Father of man.

“ But not as the offence, so also the gift.

For if by the offence of one,	much more the grace of God,
many died;	and the gift, by the grace of one
	man, Jesus Christ, hath abound-
	ed unto many.

And not as it was by one sin, so also is the gift.

For judgment indeed was by one	but grace is of many offences
unto condemnation;	unto justification.

For if by one man’s offence death	much more they who receive
reigned through one;	abundance of grace and of the
	gift, and of justice, shall reign
	in life through one, Jesus Christ.

For as by the disobedience of one	so also by the obedience of one,
man, many were made sinners;	many shall be made just.” ⁴⁷

As sons of Adam, therefore, men are sinners worthy of condemnation; but as sons of Christ they are saints, worthy of eternal life.

Christ, then, is the Father of all men virtually in that He merited for them by His passion a participation in the nature

⁴⁶ *Acts*, iv, 12.

⁴⁷ *Rom.*, v, 15-19.

of God. But He is also the actual Father of each individual man to whom He communicates His divine nature, to whom He applies the merits of His passion by generating them into a new life.

This generation is effected through the sacrament of Baptism.⁴⁸ In Baptism, Christ "actually implants within us that which we begin to receive in him and which He performed in Himself for us, that is, the destruction of our guilt and its expulsion from our soul . . . At the same time He inserted a germ—a seed, we might call it—of his spirit and grace, which, enclosed within our soul and cultivated as it should be, might afterwards sprout at its appointed time, increase in strength, and grow to the measure of the 'perfect man' . . ." ⁴⁹ It is by Baptism that men are incorporated in the passion and death of Christ,⁵⁰ for, as the Apostle says, we are saved "by the laver of regeneration."⁵¹ In Baptism all the requisites for a generation in the strictest sense of the word are verified. There is the production of a new living being, for through this sacrament man becomes a "new creature."⁵² There is a communication of the same nature because by the grace given in Baptism men become partakers of the divine nature of Christ, "by whom," says St. Peter, "he hath given us most great and precious promises that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature."⁵³ Men, in the sacrament of Baptism, proceed from Christ as from a conjoined living principle in that the grace merited by His passion is communicated to them through His human nature.⁵⁴ Hence it is that Christ is truly a father, and men by the "laver of regeneration" become His sons.

It was in view of the fact that through their divine Mediator men were to die as sons of Adam and live as sons of Christ

⁴⁸ Cf. *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 39, a. 8, ad 3um; q. 69, a. 8.

⁴⁹ Fray Luis de Leon, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁵⁰ . . . per baptismum configuratur homo passioni et resurrectioni Christi, inquantum moritur peccato et incipit novam iustitiae vitam (*Summa Theol.*, III, q. 66, a. 2).

⁵¹ *Titus*, iii, 5.

⁵³ *II Peter*, i, 4.

⁵² *II Cor.*, v, 17; *Gal.*, vi, 15.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 62, a. 5.

that Isaias called Christ "the Father of the world to come."⁵⁵ However, it must be noted that Christ is not the natural father of men, for the nature which He communicates to them is in no way due to them.⁵⁶ Hence its communication is entirely gratuitous;⁵⁷ it is by adoption that men become sons of Christ. Because Christ's fatherhood is one of adoption does not mean, however, that it is less than human paternity. On the contrary, His fatherhood is the highest participation in the paternity of God the Father; it is God Himself who gives the form to Christ's fatherhood, since the nature which Christ communicates is divine. Obviously, then, Christ's fatherhood is in the supernatural order and exceeds human paternity as heaven exceeds earth.

Despite the infinite superiority of Christ's paternity over human fatherhood, it is not the plenitude of paternity which is proper to the First Person of the Blessed Trinity Who generates a Son in an identity of nature; for men proceed from Christ only by way of a similitude of nature. Moreover, Christ, in Baptism, does not generate sons who have reached their final perfection. The grace, the participation in Christ's divine nature which they receive, is but the "seed of glory."⁵⁸ And as the sons born of Christ have not attained their perfection, He has provided for their growth, nourishment, strength, and protection through the medium of the other sacraments.⁵⁹ Consequently, Christ's work as the Father of each man is not complete with his essential generation, but continues until he reaches the stature of the "perfect man" in the life of glory.

Christ, acting as the perfect and all-loving Father, nourishes His children throughout their lives with the spiritual food of His own Body and Blood. He strengthens them and gives them

⁵⁵ *Pater futuri saeculi.* (*Isaias*, ix, 6).

⁵⁶ Cf. *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 2, a. 12.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 112, a. 1; q. 114, aa. 2, 5.

⁵⁸ *Gratia gratum faciens hoc modo comparatur ad beatitudinem sicut ratio seminalis in natura ad effectum naturalem; unde . . . gratia semen Dei nominatur* (*Summa Theol.*, I, q. 62, a. 3).

⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, III, q. 62, a. 2; q. 65, a. 4; q. 72, a. 1, ad 3um.

courage to meet life's battles in the sacrament of Confirmation. And when His children are enfeebled with the disease of sin, He places His healing hand upon them in the sacrament of Penance and restores them to health. When His children are weak and famished and at the point of death, He is with them in the sacrament of Extreme Unction, giving them added vigor to fight on to the end. It is also the duty of a father to rule and to govern.⁶⁰ Christ, being "the Father of the world to come," sees to its rule and governance by communicating His power and grace in the sacrament of Holy Orders, by which men are constituted His magistrates. A father must also propagate his species. Christ provides for the perpetuation of His divine society, and assures its members of all the supernatural helps necessary for their perfection, by giving special grace for this purpose to those who are united in the holy sacrament of Matrimony.

The fact that it is Christ Who is the author of the grace necessary for man's integral generation into the supernatural life, and the fact that this grace is transmitted through the sacraments is a matter of divine faith. Hence, because Christ is the principle of grace by which men become His sons and grow to spiritual perfection, there can be no doubt that He is the Father of all to whom He communicates His grace in the sacraments.

Christ is the Father of men because He is the great High Priest. In decreeing that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity should become Incarnate, God primarily intended that He should be the Father of men. It was included in the divine plan that Christ's fatherhood of men should be the immediate consequence of His priesthood. Indeed, the humanity, mediatorship, and priesthood of Christ were all ordered to His paternity by which He was to restore to men their life in God.

While the Incarnation in itself did not constitute Christ a priest, His priestly ordination is simultaneous with the Incarnation, "since the mission received from the Father to redeem

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 81, a. 3.

the world through His sacrifice, dates from this instant.”⁶¹ “In becoming incarnate, the Word of God assumed, so to speak, all the qualifications for and all the rights to the priesthood. By the dignity of His person and by the perfection of His holiness and His religion, He fulfilled all the requirements of a perfect priest. Yet He was not formally a priest. . . . For Jesus Christ to be a priest, it was necessary, not only that He become flesh, but that He be specially called and constituted priest by His Father . . .”⁶² But Christ was constituted priest in as much as “He was sent upon earth by His Father precisely for the purpose of representing men and offering up the sacrifice which would reconcile them with God.”⁶³ Consequently, Christ participates in the divine paternity because He is the great High Priest; for by His priestly sacrifice He became the new Father of men in as much as by it He merited for them a participation in the divine nature, by which they become sons of God.⁶⁴ And because Christ thus shares in the divine paternity, He can truly be said to be a father; for this is the primary formal claim to supernatural fatherhood.

III. THE PRIEST’S FIRST FORMAL CLAIM TO FATHERHOOD— PARTICIPATION IN THE DIVINE PATERNITY

Christ is the Father of men because He is the great High Priest. Moreover, He is the only High Priest of the New Law, as is evident from the following words of the Council of Ephesus: “If anyone say that the very Word of God did not become our High Priest and Apostle, as though this were to be said of another one . . . let him be anathema.”⁶⁵ Christ the Priest is the source of all priestly power; He “is the fountain-head of the entire priesthood.”⁶⁶ As we have seen, it was as High Priest that Christ eminently fulfilled His role as the Father of men.

⁶¹ J. Tixeront, *Holy Orders and Ordination* (St. Louis: 1928), p. 21.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Rom.*, v, 2; viii, 16.

⁶⁵ *Conc. Ephesinum*, Anathematismi Cyrilli, Can. 10; Denz., 122.

⁶⁶ Christus . . . est fons totius sacerdotii (*Summa Theol.*, III, q. 22, a. 4).

Since His Ascension into heaven, however, Christ is not present upon earth as a visible priest. Nevertheless, in as much as He is the everlasting propitiation for sin,⁶⁷ "always living to make intercession for us,"⁶⁸ He continues to function as our High Priest in heaven.

Although Christ the Priest is no longer visibly present upon earth, the fruits of His priesthood are being daily transmitted to men. Since our divine Lord understood perfectly the nature of man and his need for visible signs and institutions,⁶⁹ He established upon earth a visible priesthood,⁷⁰ whose members He empowered⁷¹ to communicate to men the redemptive grace merited by His priestly sacrifice. The members of this visible priesthood, however, are not so much Christ's successors as they are in very truth partakers of His priesthood. They are more than representatives of the great High Priest; for they act in the very person of Christ.⁷² For this reason St. Paul could say: "For what I have pardoned, if I have pardoned anything, for your sakes I have done it in the person of Christ."⁷³ Thus the priest becomes identified with the great High Priest in all his ministerial acts. His official acts are Christ's acts, for Our Blessed Lord Himself says of His priests: "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me."⁷⁴ The members of the priesthood of the New Law, then, are equipped with Christ's divine authority and the plenitude of His power so that they can bring to men the salvific effects of His sacrifice. They are thus made sharers in the eternal priesthood of Christ; in fact, the priesthood of Christ and that of His ministers is one and the same thing.

⁶⁷ I *John*, ii, 2.

⁶⁸ *Heb.*, vii, 25.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Catechis. Concilii Trident.*, Pars II, cap. I, # 14.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Conc. Trident.*, sess. XXII, cap. 1; *Denz.*, 938.

⁷¹ *Matt.*, xxviii, 18-20.

⁷² *Sacerdos . . . novae legis in persona ipsius (Christi) operatur (Summa Theol., III, q. 22, a. 4).*

⁷³ II *Cor.*, ii, 10.

⁷⁴ *Luke*, x, 16.

Christ instituted the priesthood of the New Law, when, at the Last Supper, He commanded His Apostles to continue the Eucharistic Sacrifice which He had just performed. By the words, "Do this for a commemoration of me," He conferred upon them the power proper to priests of the New Law, the power to offer the same sacrifice.⁷⁵ The Apostles and their successors, to whom they were to transmit this sacred power,⁷⁶ are thus made participants in the priesthood of Christ. This participation is effected by means of the character of the sacrament of Holy Orders, by which men are configured to the one great High Priest.

Originally, the term character was used to signify an image or figure which was indelibly imprinted or carved in wood or stone. Of its very nature, then, a character is something permanent and ineffaceable. Later, the word came to be used to denote a sign bringing about a resemblance between its bearer and the person in whose name he acted. "Thus soldiers, who are assigned to military service, are marked with their leader's sign, by which they are, in a fashion, likened to him."⁷⁷ This figure has been borrowed to designate the instrumental power conferred by certain of the sacraments by which men are configured to Christ and made participants in His priesthood.⁷⁸

"A character," says St. Thomas, "is properly a kind of seal, whereby something is marked as being ordained to some particular end."⁷⁹ More specifically, "a character is a kind of seal by which the soul is marked, so that it may receive, or bestow on others, things pertaining to Divine worship."⁸⁰ If the character is one by which we receive things pertaining to the divine cult, it is passive. If, however, by the character we bestow things pertaining to the divine worship, then it is an active power.⁸¹ While it is true that all sacramental characters are "certain participations in Christ's priesthood, flowing from

⁷⁵ *Conc. Trident.*, sess. XXII, cap. 9, can. 2; Denz., 949.

⁷⁶ *Conc. Trident.*, sess. XXII, cap. 1; Denz. 938.

⁷⁷ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 63, a. 3, ad 2um.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, a. 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, a. 4.

⁷⁹ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 63, a. 3.

⁸¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, a. 2.

Christ Himself,"⁸² the character of sacred ordination is a much fuller participation in His priesthood, and is the closest configuration to Christ in His office as Priest. By configuration is meant the conformity of the priest to the one great High Priest. Just as Christ is the image of the Father,⁸³ so the priest is the image of Christ, because by the character of Sacred Orders the priesthood of Christ is impressed upon him, thus making him the minister of the grace merited for men by the priestly act of Christ. By this character the priest is invested with divine authority and given the power to act in the very person of Christ. In a word, he thus becomes "another Christ."

It is by the sacramental character of Holy Orders, then, that men are configured to Christ, the great High Priest, and are given an intimate share in His priesthood. Since, however, the fatherhood of Christ immediately flows from His priesthood, whoever shares in Christ's priesthood, by that very fact, participates in His divine paternity. Therefore, when one is ordained a priest of the New Law, he immediately by that fact becomes a father of men. Virtually, he becomes the father of all men in as much as Christ merited the grace of adoption for all. It is for this reason that St. John Chrysostom says that the priest is "the common Father of the whole world."⁸⁴ At the same time the priest is the actual father of all those to whom this grace is communicated through the sacraments, and particularly the sacrament of Baptism. Thus St. Gregory, St. Jerome, and St. Alphonsus rightly call the priest "the Father of Christians."⁸⁵

Unlike a natural father, the priest does not have to wait until he begets a child to become a father. His ordination, therefore, is not analogous in this respect to Matrimony which confers sacramental grace for properly disposing its recipients for

⁸² *Ibid.*, a. 3.

⁸³ *Coloss.*, i, 15.

⁸⁴ *Quasi communis totius orbis pater sacerdos est (In I Tim., cap., ii, Hom. VI; P. L., 62, 529.*

⁸⁵ Cf. St. Alphonsus, *Dignity and Duties of the Priest or Selva* (New York: 1888), pp. 144, 234.

the generation of offspring, but the moment a man becomes a priest he likewise becomes a father. By his priesthood, which is one with the priesthood of Christ, all men who are children of Christ have been begotten. For this reason the priest is the father of every person, living or dead, who has become a child of Christ by Baptism. Moreover, the priest is the virtual father of all men, even those who are not Christians, since by his priesthood, which is one with Christ's priesthood, there is merited for all the grace to become sons of Christ. Thus the priest shares in the supernatural adoptive fatherhood of Christ, which is the closest possible participation in the fullness of divine paternity. While there are many other reasons why the priest can lay claim to the title of spiritual paternity, these are of relatively minor significance when compared to this intimate participation in the fatherhood of God.

IV. THE PRIEST'S SECOND FORMAL CLAIM TO FATHERHOOD— THE SACRAMENTAL MINISTRY

We have arrived at the priest's claim to paternity by his participation in the one, eternal priesthood of Christ. But, unlike the claim to natural fatherhood, this is not one which comes simultaneously with the exercise of the particular functions of a father. In the natural order, one is not a father until he actually and personally generates a creature like unto himself. But before the priest personally generates he is a father; for he participates in the divine paternity by the very fact that he is a priest. Since his priesthood and that of Christ are one, the moment he shares in the priesthood he is the father of all those who have become sons of God through the saving grace of Christ the Priest. Should a priest never personally communicate to others the principle of divine life, he would nevertheless be a true father, for by his priesthood he participates in the fatherhood of God, which is the fundamental formal claim to paternity. However, even if we were unable to come to a knowledge of the participation of the priest in the

divine paternity by his sharing Christ's priesthood, it would be evident that the priest is a father since he performs those functions which are proper to a father. In other words, each and every duty which belongs to the integral nature of fatherhood is, in the supernatural order, a function proper to priests of the New Law.

From the very notion of fatherhood we know that it belongs to the paternal office to beget offspring and to bring that offspring to its integral perfection. The requisites for the life of an individual in the natural and supernatural order are parallel. Everyone recognizes the five following indispensable needs for the natural life of the individual man: birth, growth, nourishment, the removal of disease, and the increase of waning strength. Therefore, the supplying of the foregoing necessities belongs properly to the office of a father. In order to live the supernatural life man must be born spiritually, and his life must be preserved and increased. But, as we have seen, man is born into the supernatural life by the influx into his soul of the grace won for him by the priestly sacrifice of Christ. It is this grace which is the principle of man's new life. Consequently, the one who communicates to man this grace and preserves it in his soul is properly a father because by so acting he performs functions which pertain to the very nature of fatherhood.

For the communication of this divine life to the souls of men Christ instituted the seven sacraments of the New Law. It is well to note that He instituted seven sacraments, not more nor less, because the requisites for the individual and social life of man in the supernatural order, as well as in the natural order, are seven. *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, in a beautiful analogy between the natural and spiritual life which it borrows from St. Thomas, shows the fittingness of seven sacraments for the communication and preservation of supernatural life.

In order to exist, to preserve existence, and to contribute to his own and to the public good, seven things seem necessary to man: to be born, to grow, to be nurtured, to be cured when sick, when

weak to be strengthened; as far as regards the public weal: to have magistrates invested with authority to govern, and, finally, to perpetuate himself and his species by legitimate offspring. Analogous then as all these things obviously are, to that life by which the soul lives to God, we discover in them a reason to account for the number of Sacraments. Amongst them, the first is Baptism, the gate, as it were, to all the other sacraments, by which we are born again to Christ. The next is Confirmation, by which we grow up, and are strengthened in the grace of God: for, as St. Augustine observes, "to the Apostles who have already received baptism, the Redeemer said: 'stay you in the city till you be imbued with power from on high.'" The third is the Eucharist, that true bread from heaven which nourishes our souls to eternal life, according to these words of the Saviour: "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." The fourth is Penance, by which the soul, which has caught the contagion of sin, is restored to spiritual health. The fifth is Extreme Unction, which obliterates the traces of sin, and invigorates the powers of the soul; of which St. James says: "if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him." The sixth is Holy Orders, which gives power to perpetuate in the Church the public administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of all the sacred functions of the ministry. The seventh and last is Matrimony, a sacrament instituted for the legitimate union of man and woman, for the conservation of the human race, and the education of children, in the knowledge of religion, and the love and fear of God.⁸⁶

Of these seven sacraments the first five are necessary for the life of the individual. Therefore, the minister of these five sacraments is truly and formally a father, for in administering them he generates a new creature and brings that creature to its perfection. By virtue of his sacerdotal office, the priest is the ordinary dispenser of the grace of the sacraments and it pertains to the very essence of the priestly office to administer the first five sacraments. Moreover, it is the five functions performed in the administration of these sacraments which constitute the integral nature of fatherhood. Consequently, by virtue of his sacramental ministry the priest is formally a father.

The priest is not the minister of the sacraments of Holy

⁸⁶ *Catechis. Concilii Trident.*, Pars II, Cap. 1, # 20-21. Cf. *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 65, a. 1.

Orders and Matrimony because the grace communicated by these sacraments is not directly ordained to either essential or integral supernatural generation. The needs supplied by these two sacraments are necessities not of the individual, but of the social order. Both provide for the perpetuation of society, the one by giving the grace to actually constitute men fathers in the supernatural order, the other by imparting the grace to dispose men to become good fathers in the natural order. But neither to constitute men fathers nor to directly dispose men for the fitting exercise of the paternal functions pertains formally to the office of a father. Hence, in so acting one does not function formally in the office of fatherhood, although such action is intimately connected with it. Consequently, any man in assuming the office of either a natural or supernatural father must do so of his own accord. Neither his natural or spiritual father can compel him to do so, for they have no authority in this matter, which is ordained to the public and not the individual good.

Since it pertains to the very essence of the priesthood to administer those sacraments, and only those sacraments, which are directly ordained to spiritual birth and integral supernatural generation, it is evident that the priestly office is, of its very nature, a paternal office. The priest is the principle of the transmission and the preservation of divine life in the souls of men. The divinity of Christ the priest is, of course, the primary principle of this divine life, but because the Great High Priest is no longer visibly present upon this earth He has deputed His priests to act in His person in the communication of this supernatural life. That Christ has given those who are configured to Him by the sacramental character of Holy Orders the power to communicate this new life by administering the sacraments necessary for man's generation and continued existence in the supernatural order is a doctrine defined by the Church,⁸⁷ and evident from the words of Sacred Scripture.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Joannes XXII, *Constitut.* "*Gloriosam Ecclesiam*," 23 Jan., 1318; Denz. 486. S. Pius V, Bulla "*Ex omnibus afflictionibus*," 1 Oct., 1567; Denz. 1058.

⁸⁸ *I Cor.*, iv, 1; *Matt.*, xxviii, 19; *Luke*, xxii, 19; *John* xx, 23; *James*, v, 14.

While the divinity of Christ is the primary principle in the communication of grace, there are, besides the sacraments themselves, two secondary or instrumental principles, one of which is conjoined to the divinity, the other of which is separated from it. The humanity of Christ is the secondary conjoined principle, whereas the priest is the secondary separated principle. This distinction of secondary or instrumental principles in this case, however, is something accidental to the nature of fatherhood; the separated principle here has the same power as the conjoined principle in as much as the latter has given the plenitude of His power to the former.⁸⁹ Moreover, since the priest, the secondary principle of supernatural life, is an animated instrument, he operates personally in spiritual generation. The role of the priest in the transmission of divine life through the sacraments is more easily seen from the following diagram:

	Primary	The Divinity of Christ
The Principle of Supernatural Generation	S or I	
	e n	Conjoined . . . The Humanity of Christ
	c s	
	o t	Ani-
	n r	mated
	d u	
a m		Separated . . . The Priest
r e		
y n		
	t	Inanimated The Sacraments
	a	
	l	

Just as human parents are the secondary principles in human production, priests are the secondary principles of the communication of spiritual life. Hence the following statement of St. Thomas concerning human parents is likewise applicable to priests in the supernatural order: "Parents are the principles

⁸⁹ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 64, a. 3; *Matt.*, xxviii, 18; *John*, xx, 21.

of our being . . . ,” that is, secondary principles after God.⁹⁰ Since, then, those who share in the priesthood of Christ, are truly principles of integral supernatural generation and since such principles are formally fathers, there can be no doubt of the priest’s formal claim to fatherhood by reason of his sacramental ministry.

We shall now show how in administering each of the sacraments necessary for integral spiritual life the priest performs a function proper to the office of fatherhood. The sacrament by which men are born into the supernatural life is Baptism.⁹¹ For this reason, St. Paul refers to it as “the laver of regeneration.”⁹² Through Baptism sanctifying grace is infused into men’s souls so that they become partakers of the divine nature and are thus made sons of God. Since, however, it is the priest who is the ordinary minister of Baptism and since this sacrament effects a true generation, the priest in administering it is performing the primary function of a father. It is by a right inherent in the sacerdotal office that the priest administers this sacrament, for “. . . by Baptism a man becomes a participator in ecclesiastical unity, wherefore also he receives the right to approach Our Lord’s Table. Consequently, just as it belongs to a priest to consecrate the Eucharist, which is the principal cause of the priesthood, so it is the proper office of a priest to baptize, since it belongs to one and the same to produce the whole and to dispose the part in the whole.”⁹³

The priest, then, is a spiritual father participating in the supernatural fatherhood of Christ, for he is the principle of man’s generation into the divine life. Hence, says St. John Chrysostom: “It is to priests that spiritual birth and regeneration by Baptism is entrusted. By them we put on Christ and are united to the Son of God and become partakers of that blessed head. Hence we should regard them as more august

⁹⁰ Deus . . . est nobis essendi . . . primum principium. Secundaria vero nostri esse . . . principia sunt parentes . . . (*Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 101, a. 1).

⁹¹ *Conc. Trident.*, sess. ii, cap. II; Denz. 895; *Rom.*, vi, 1-8.

⁹² *Titus*, iii, 5.

⁹³ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 67, a. 2.

than princes and kings and more venerable than parents. For the latter begot us of blood and the flesh, but priests are the cause of our generation from God, of our spiritual regeneration, of our true freedom and sonship according to grace.”⁹⁴ From these words of the great Father of the Church it is obvious that he ascribes to the priest the conferring of divine sonship, which is the effect of the priestly sacrifice of Christ, in whose priesthood he participates.

Baptism alone, however, like human birth, does not fulfill all the implications integral to generation. Should the newly born spiritual child be left to himself, he would not grow to maturity, he would be helpless against the attacks of the enemies of the spiritual life, or he would die from the lack of care and nourishment. Just as in the natural order it is necessary that a child be brought to maturity and strengthened so that he will be able to repel any advances of the enemies of his natural life, so, too, the spiritual child must be strengthened so that he will be able to ward off any attack upon his supernatural life. For this purpose he receives a more abundant infusion of grace in the sacrament of Confirmation. This sacrament is compared to Baptism as growth to generation. Confirmation brings the child to spiritual maturity,⁹⁵ for by it “the fullness of the Holy Ghost is given for the spiritual strength that belongs to the perfect age.”⁹⁶ By the character impressed upon the soul in this sacrament, the recipient has a perpetual title to actual divine assistance in the defense of his spiritual life.

In administering Confirmation, the priest is perfecting and bringing to spiritual maturity the child he begot in Baptism. He is thus performing a paternal act which pertains to the integral generation of his offspring. While the simple priest is not the ordinary minister of Confirmation, when he does administer this sacrament, he is performing a function which

⁹⁴ *De Sacerdotio*, lib. iii, n. 6, in *PG* XLVIII, 643-44.

⁹⁵ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 72, a. 1.

⁹⁶ In hoc sacramento (Confirmationis) datur plenitudo Spiritus Sancti ad robur spirituale, quod competit perfectae aetati (*Ibid.*, a. 2).

belongs primarily to the sacerdotal office, for to confirm is an act of Orders. While the general practice of the Church has ever been that Bishops should administer this sacrament, the fundamental reason why they can administer it is because of the power they have by reason of their sacerdotal character. This is evident from the fact that in the Eastern Churches the priests are commonly the ministers of Confirmation and their administrations are recognized by the Church as valid.⁹⁷ However, the Bishop, not the priest, is the ordinary minister of this sacrament, as the Council of Trent explicitly declares.⁹⁸ For valid administration of Confirmation the priest needs the delegation of the Supreme Pontiff. But since by delegation the character received in Holy Orders is in no way changed, the fact remains that the power to confirm arises from the sacerdotal character, even though this power may not be validly exercised without proper delegation. Thus the administration of this sacrament, whether by a Bishop or a simple priest, is an act that is performed primarily in virtue of participation in Christ's priesthood. And of its very nature it is a paternal act, for it has for its purpose the integral generation of offspring.

Not only must a child be free from outward attacks, but he must be nurtured so that the life within him may be preserved and perfected.⁹⁹ In view of this fact Christ instituted the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist for nourishing the supernatural life of His children. The effect of the Eucharist is signified in the manner in which it is given, that is, by way of food. "And, therefore, this sacrament does for the spiritual life all that material bread does for bodily life; namely, by sustaining, giving increase, restoring and giving delight."¹⁰⁰ Thus could Our Lord truly say, "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."¹⁰¹

Just as man's natural life is sustained by material food, so,

⁹⁷ Cf. *Const. "Etsi Pastoralis,"* Benedicti XIV, Denz. 1458.

⁹⁸ Sess. vii, *Canones de Sacramento Confirmationis*, can. 3; Denz. 873.

⁹⁹ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 79, a. 1, ad 1um.

¹⁰⁰ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 79, a. 1.

¹⁰¹ *John*, vi, 56.

too, his spiritual life is sustained and invigorated by this Bread of Life. This spiritual food not only augments the supernatural life received in Baptism, but "whatever losses the soul sustains by falling into some slight offenses, these the Eucharist, which cancels lesser sins, repairs in the same manner, not to depart from the illustration already adduced, that natural food, as we know from experience, gradually repairs the daily waste caused by the vital heat of the system. Of this heavenly Sacrament justly, therefore, has St. Ambrose said: 'This daily bread is taken as a remedy for daily infirmity.'"¹⁰²

The priest alone is the ordinary minister of this Living Bread, as is evident from the words of Christ to His Apostles, "Do this for a commemoration of Me," by which words priests alone were designated.¹⁰³ Since the dispensing of the Eucharist is manifestly a spiritual feeding, a means of preserving and augmenting the supernatural life given in Baptism, and since such an act is proper to a father, there can be no doubt that the priest in administering this Sacrament is functioning formally as a spiritual father.

Besides nourishing his children, a father also has the duty of restoring them to health when they are afflicted with sickness and disease. This is done in the natural order by procuring the proper medicaments and providing special care. In the sacrament of Penance, Christ has provided for the cure of His spiritual children who are suffering from the disease of sin; for "as a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear him."¹⁰⁴ It is He "Who forgiveth all thy iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases."¹⁰⁵ In this sacrament there is applied the grace that heals the wounds of the soul. Penance also makes provision for the paternal instruction and admonition necessary for the preservation and improvement of spiritual health. Just as the natural child must

¹⁰² *Cathechis. Concilii Trident.*, Pars. II, cap. 4, # 52.

¹⁰³ Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 845, § 1; also *Conc. Trident.*, sess. xiii, c. 8; sess. xxiii, c. 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Psalm cii*, 13.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

be taught the habits of good health, so, too, the child of God must be instructed in the rules for safeguarding his spiritual health. Thus this sacrament furnishes not only a cure for spiritual sickness, but it also gives individual instruction and direction which will enable its recipient to live the supernatural life to the fullest.

Priests, and priests alone, are the ministers of this sacrament, for Christ's words, "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained,"¹⁰⁶ were directed to them alone. As can be readily seen, all the duties of the minister of the sacrament of Penance are paternal ones; a father is obliged to care for his child in time of sickness, and to rule, govern and instruct him so that he may reach the perfection of life. Therefore, the priest's role in this sacrament is above all else that of a father.

A father must care for his children not only in time of mortal sickness, but he must provide a cure for their less serious illnesses. Moreover, after the child has been restored to health, it is the duty of his father to see to the removal of any defect, debility, or weakness which results from the sickness. The father must especially take care that the enemies of the life of the child are not permitted to take advantage of such debility and weakness. In the supernatural order the child is often sick with the less devastating disease of venial sin. Moreover, he is being constantly weakened by the effects which remain after sin, especially original sin.¹⁰⁷ Because of the debilitating effects of these remains of sin, the spiritual child needs special strength and assistance to overcome those who would prevent his attaining the perfection of his supernatural life. The time at which the enemies of his soul will be more prodigious than ever in their efforts to take advantage of such weakness is at the hour of death, for this is the last opportunity they have of preventing the child of God from reaching the stature of "the perfect man" in the life of glory.

Provision has been made for this need in the sacrament

¹⁰⁶ *John*, xx, 23.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Summa Theol.*, Suppl., q. 30, a. 1.

of Extreme Unction, for “. . . in the other sacraments, our Redeemer prepared the greatest aids whereby during life Christians may preserve themselves whole from every grievous spiritual evil, so did He guard the close of life, by the sacrament of Extreme Unction, as with a most firm defense. For though our adversary seeks and seizes opportunities all our life long to be able in any way to devour our souls, yet there is no time wherein he strains more vehemently all the powers of his craft to ruin us utterly, and if he can possibly, to make us fall from trust in the mercy of God, than when he perceives the end of our life is at hand.”¹⁰⁸

Extreme Unction not only cures the disease of sin, but it also removes all the debilities that result from sin.¹⁰⁹ It also gives strength to the child of God at the very moment he needs it most, so that he may overcome the violent assaults of his enemies and thus attain the perfection of life. “The proper ministers of this sacrament,” says the Council of Trent, “are the presbyters of the Church by which name are to be understood . . . either bishops or priests, rightly ordained by the imposition of the hands of the priesthood.”¹¹⁰ Since, then, priests are properly the ministers of Extreme Unction, and in as much as the functions performed by the ministers of this sacrament pertain directly to the paternal office, the priest in administering it is truly a father.

Thus the sacramental ministry of the priest in the supernatural order corresponds to the office of fatherhood in the natural order. However, the fatherhood of the priest, even in this respect, infinitely surpasses human paternity; for, as St. John Chrysostom so beautifully puts it: “. . . God has given to priests greater power than to our natural parents, and so much greater as the future life excels the present. For our parents begot us to the present life, but priests to the life to come, and the former cannot ward off from their children the death of the

¹⁰⁸ *Conc. Trident.*, sess. xiv, cap. 9, Denz. 907.

¹⁰⁹ *Summa Theol.*, loc. cit.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Canones de Extrema Unctione*, can. 4; Denz. 929.

body, nor hinder disease from attacking them, whereas the latter often preserve souls that are ill and about to die . . . And not only in our regeneration have they the power to remit sin, but they also have the power to remit sins committed after regeneration. Moreover, parents according to nature can be of no assistance to their children if they chance to offend anyone in dignity and power. But priests have often reconciled them, not with kings or princes, but with God himself when incensed against them.”¹¹¹

CONCLUSION

We have established by solid theological arguments that the priest is truly the spiritual father of all. But such argumentation is of little value if its conclusion is not to be the driving force of priestly life. This doctrine imposes upon the priest the obligation of seeing in himself a spiritual father, for to be ignorant of this God-given role is to fail to understand the nature of the priesthood with the consequent impossibility of properly discharging its sacred obligations. In realizing that he is the spiritual father of the whole world, that it is of the very essence of the priestly office to take the place of Christ here on earth as the new Father of men, the conscientious priest cannot fail to see his obligation to conform himself more and more to His divine Model. He will study eagerly the life of Christ in search of His paternal virtues so that he may know just what virtues should be the special equipment of his own priestly life. Children are something of their father, they become like their father; and since the priest is a father who stands in the place of Christ, he must strive to have, in so far as it is possible, every paternal virtue which is to be found in Christ Himself so that his children, through him, may be more perfectly conformed to their Blessed Saviour. The matter of uncovering and delineating the precisely paternal virtues in the life of Christ is a study well worth development, as it will afford the priest very definite ideals to

¹¹¹ *De Sacerdotio*, lib. III, n. 6, in *PG* XLVIII, 644.

guide him in preparing himself for the fitting exercise of his paternal office.

In recognizing the nature and obligations of his role as spiritual father, the priest cannot but have a greater appreciation of the divine Fatherhood within the Godhead as well as of the participations in this divine Paternity by himself and human fathers. He will understand that all his strivings, as indeed the efforts of all fathers, are but a reflection of the eternal divine action within the Blessed Trinity. He and all fathers are thus seen in their admirable roles as cooperators with God in the communication of life.

Since the priest is to communicate and preserve spiritual life throughout the world, his obligations are without limit. First of all, there is the duty of teaching men that he is really and truly their father, and that consequently they have the right to expect of him every possible means of help for preserving and increasing the supernatural life in their souls. This the priest must teach by word; but the truth and implications of this doctrine will be more eloquently preached by the example of his life. The priest who is ever eager to communicate and preserve the divine life in the souls of men lets pass no opportunity to administer the Sacraments. Never will he go to the confessional without giving a word of paternal instruction and encouragement to lead his children to a more abundant sharing in the treasures of the spiritual life.

Just as no problem which concerns the progress of the natural life of his children escapes the vigilance of a human father, so, too, no action which has to do with the spiritual development of the child lies beyond the orbit of sacerdotal duty. In as much as every human action is good or bad and therefore beneficial or detrimental to spiritual life, it is difficult to conceive of any human affair which does not concern the priest. This does not mean that one can do nothing without first consulting a priest, but it does imply that the priest has the duty of equipping his children with the knowledge necessary to perform all their actions well, to supernaturalize them, thus making them meri-

torious for improved spiritual health here below and for the perfection of spiritual life in the world to come. Nor is it always necessary that the priest personally perform all his paternal functions. There are, indeed, many which can and must be delegated, just as in the natural order parents must depute others to assist them in educating and safeguarding their children.

While spiritual fatherhood imposes upon the priest the cares and obligations of a father, it lays upon the faithful the duties of children. They are bound to love, honor and respect the fathers of their spiritual lives. When the faithful begin to see the priest as he really is, the father and guardian of their souls, they will rush to him with all their problems, and much of the evil and unhappiness which results from a lack of paternal care and advice will be avoided. Those who are wracking their brains for a cure for the evils of our times and especially for the delinquency of the young will find their answer in a closer relationship between priest and people. In the spiritual life all men are children, and when they find in their priests all-loving fathers who are eagerly awaiting to help them, evils will be eradicated and progress in virtue and happiness will come and come quickly.

Should this doctrine become a living fact, a truth, which as God intended, would influence men's lives, there would be thrown open wide the road to peace, peace in the Church, peace in the world, peace in the hearts of men. The faithful would have at their service an army of zealous fathers whose only thought would be to assist them in progressing in the spiritual life. The priests would have to work more, it is true; they would be overburdened, but they would be filled with a happiness which is but a foretaste of the eternal joy that will be theirs when, at the end of their labors, they can report to their Master: "I have suffered the little children to come unto you."

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