

# The Father

By Eugene S. Geissler

If you think of the human being as composed of concentrated circles the child is at the core.

The second concentric circle is youth. The third concentric circle is grown man of whom it is said the child is father.

It is the age of joy and of dominion in which man is husband to his wife father of his children and ruler of the world.

"My father can do anything," the little son says truthfully. This age goes on for a long time fifteen, twenty, and even twenty-five years and all the time the man is in his prime strong and generous and hopeful while carrying the burden of the world.

His power is not unlimited, but in his own little world he is a powerful man. Youth when it reaches this age has its chance to run the world. But in spite of new vigor and new ideals there is a new sense of the human reality.

Marriage is humanizing—and spiritualizing. The love of wife makes man protective. Children in his lap and in his house teach him how slowly the human race moves forward.

Only slowly he learns the full meaning of a child and its impact on his life. A father is more made than born. He grows up to his fatherhood only gradually.

The making of a father is a two-way street the while he is making himself into a father he is also being made into a father. While the child learns indeed many things from him the child has also something to teach.

Or as it says in a poem:  
"Or did she mean that I might learn from him?  
A son can teach a father what he should have been."

Except perhaps in his marriage a man will never again have as many opportunities and natural motives as many reminders and incentives to correct and to perfect himself as on this two-way street between father and child.

Even more, having learned to be a father to his child he has at the same time learned how to be a child of God, the father of us all. A whole new era of understanding now opens up to him for the first time.

## KNOW YOUR FAITH

It is like the close of the circle of experience between his own father, himself, and his child. Now that he is in the center he can see full circle for the first time.

From the center of the circle he begins slowly to know and comprehend his own role as father, his own father, and God's role as father of all mankind. He begins to know and understand what he never knew and understood before: all the problems, efforts, nuances heartaches, joys and disappointments of the paternal-filial relationship. To him it is no idle statement: Be you perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.

A father knows what it means to try. He finds himself at this time close to the child he is at the core. His own childhood and his own fatherhood are closely related. Much more so than the youth he more recently was.

The child he was is his companion in dealing with his own children. He thinks about the things his own father did for him. He thinks about the things he left undone perhaps for him to manage by himself. He thinks about the values his father tried to pass on to him. He rediscovers his own childhood just as in the next age, one of failure he will rediscover the loneliness of his youth.

If ever man has a chance to be happy in this life, to taste true joy it is when he is in his strength when his marriage is new and his children are young.

Other times have their compensations but this one in a way has everything. The child is a state of becoming. Youth is wasted on youth, we say. The later man feels his power waning and the old man is mostly out of it.

But in the middle, in his prime the husband of his wife and the father of his children is making his impression on the world. Lucky man!

# Interesting Questions about Stephen

By FR. WALTER M. ABBOTT, S.J.

Many commentators have observed that Luke's account of Stephen's work and death (Acts 6:8-8:3) resembles his account of the work and death of Jesus. There is a similar career of preaching and miracles. Then opposition develops. The Jewish leaders, the teachers of the Law, and the people are stirred up. There is the accusation that "this man is always talking against our sacred Temple and the Law of Moses." There is a trial before the Council (Sanhedrin), and Stephen is executed outside the city.

There are some notable differences, of course. Before the Council, as far as we know from the Gospels, Jesus was meek, restrained, apparently for the most part silent. Stephen gave the Council members a long sermon which became an impassioned attack on them. Jesus was handed over to the Roman authorities for crucifixion. Stephen was stoned to death by the infuriated members of the Jewish Council themselves.

## Scripture in Life Of Church Today

One tends to forget these differences when one comes to the end of Stephen's story, which is so much like what Jesus did before he died: "He knelt down and cried in a loud voice, 'Lord! Do not remember this sin against them.' He said this and died."

Many commentators have said that Stephen really didn't answer the charges made against him, but I think he did, in his own deliberate way. I wonder if you will agree that the long review of Old Testament salvation history, which makes up most of his speech, was designed to show that he knew as much about it as the members of the Council, and that he actually had more respect for the Law than they did.

In the latter part of his speech he does, indeed, speak against the Temple (7:48-52). In fact, he views the established Jewish

leaders, of his own day and for many years previously, as apostates from God. In fact, he seems to hold that ever since the time of Moses and the golden calf incident the leaders of the Jewish faith have been apostates from God. I think this is a fair interpretation of the latter part of his speech.

If this analysis of the speech is correct, Stephen's position would also have isolated him from the majority of the early Christians, who daily continued to come to the Temple for the teaching of the apostles. Like the apostles, Luke, the author of the Acts, had a very special regard for the Temple. As for the Jewish leaders, the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament generally present Jesus as holding they are, and have been the legitimate occupants of the chair of Moses. In one sense it could be said that the whole first effort of Jesus and the apostles and, later, Paul was to persuade those teachers of Israel that a special time of fulfillment of the Law had come.

Stephen, however, seems to have "written off" the whole

Jewish hierarchy as hopeless, and his speech doesn't seem to manifest any of the reverence for the Temple which we have seen is so characteristic of Luke in his Gospel and in the Acts.

Now here is a good question for you. Do you think the speech of Stephen is unlike the other speeches in Acts, or does it fit in with the others to make a single, coherent theological position? Behind that question is another one: Do you think that Luke composed the speech of Stephen, in accordance with what we have seen was a traditional procedure among ancient writers, or does it come from another source which Luke used? You will find good scholars on both sides of the two questions.

In either case, one has to explain the interesting fact that Luke gave so much space to the story of Stephen and his speech. You can argue that Stephen must have been very important in the early Church. Indeed he must have been if he was the first one elected to manage separately the affairs of the Greek-speaking Jews.



## Differences

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and solutions. Contrary to popular opinion, most men do not see women as lowly, inferior, stupid, or dumb.  
Now is the time to build a bridge to the future, a future in which men and women will be free to work together, thereby creating a new life-style. To do this will require much imagination and creativity. For many women, life has been given value because of their role as wife and mother, and their total commitment to their families.  
As Dr. Morton Hunt, noted writer on sex roles, pointed out: "The women's lib extremists make such an issue of hatred for men, marriage and mothering that they don't offer women liberation at all — just a way of cutting off many things that are gratifying to many women. Women have multiple desires, and a complex answer is better than a simple answer."



can be looked at as being composed of concentric circles, when a man reaches fatherhood he can also see the interlocking experiences of his own understanding of life and his place therein.