Vinayasādhana
Dharmaram Journal of Psycho-Spiritual Formation
VOL. VIII, No. 2, July 2017

A Woman's Perspective on a Spirituality of Brotherhood

Janet K. Ruffing RSM
Professor in the Practice of Spirituality and Ministerial Leadership, Yale Divinity School

Abstract

Religious brothers remain poorly understood in the contemporary church. Since Vatican II, they have undergone their own renewal recognizing more clearly the particular charism of the brother as distinct from and resistant to clericalism, based authentically in the non-hierarchical relationship of being a brother to the brotherless. The essay testifies to experiences with brothers, their vocational roots in the Biblical stories of brothers and the explicit teachings of Jesus about non-hierarchical relationships in the reign of God. Contemporary brothers have explicitly rejected all forms of clericalism, and embraced egalitarian forms of relationship, and renewed attitudes toward work. Insights from the psychology of masculine development have yielded insight to their own development and can further enhance their ministries with boys and men.

Introduction

How might we understand the particular contribution to the life of the church and, for that matter, to the life of the whole human family of the spirituality of religious brothers? Despite concerns in some countries about vocations to communities of brothers, they, nevertheless, continue to discover and embody more fully a unique and unequivocal witness

to the values that ground their lives. Like all religious men and women since Vatican Council II, religious brothers have probed their particular charism within the Church and discovered deeper meanings in the rich symbolism of professing Brotherhood and more conscious ways of articulating their vision.

As I reflect on my personal experience of some brothers I have known over the years from at least five different communities of brothers; I am grateful for their ability to be "brother" to me as a woman and as a "sister." I still remember my first experience of collaboration with a mixed community of brothers and priests whose core identity was their common brotherhood rather than the priesthood. We were all teachers in single-sex secondary schools, so we shared similar ministry backgrounds. These men did half of the work involved in our shared project. I discovered I could count on them to come through with what they had promised. I rapidly noticed they were used to taking care of themselves and unselfconsciously shared all the tasks that usually fall to women in such mixed gendered situations. The result was feeling respected, cared for, genuinely partnered, productive and lighthearted in the midst of our work together. I, who had grown up in a family with only one sibling, a brother quite close in age to me immediately knew I was in relational "Brother" territory.

I would first like to examine this charism of brotherhood in the context of the family of metaphors to which it belongs, the deeper theological and spiritual implications of this designation, and both the negative and positive valences of this symbol. I would then like to explore some contemporary understandings of this charism of brotherhood in the context of religious consecration and its prophetic potential to respond to the needs of both men and women in relationship to the wounds of patriarchy inflicted on all of us. Examining the spirituality of brotherhood in the light of newly developing understandings of masculine spirituality and gender sensitivity to women may suggest some fresh trajectories for growth.

Stories of Brothers in the Scripture

Within the biblical witness, the relationship of brothers to one another in their patriarchal culture is deeply ambivalent. Cain and Abel's differing gifts and occupations end in fratricide, and their story is one of several in Genesis that portray a fracturing of the human community. Another pair of brothers with an uneasy relationship with one another is Jacob and

Esau. The preference for the first-born male regarding inheritance and dominance of the family group does not always favor the more gifted or competent brother for the accompanying responsibility. Jacob, the less "manly" man in the story, coerces his hungry brother into relinquishing his birthright for a bowl of lentils and deceives his father, Isaac, to secure the blessing intended for his elder brother. Jacob's son, Joseph, the dreamer and his father's favorite, evokes his brothers' envy to the extent that they nearly kill him. His oldest brother tries valiantly to modify this agonistic male violence toward Joseph by selling him into slavery to save his life. This complex story brings these brothers together once again in a heart-rending and moving reconciliation scene, when Joseph invites his brother to come closer and recognize him as their brother, Joseph. At this point in the narrative, he is in the dominant position to save them from starvation while his brothers need to repair their relationships with one another in the midst of this stunning reversal of roles. Joseph responds to his obvious love, a display of intense emotion, and forgiveness.

Moses and Aaron appear to get along pretty well together and form a team to lead the people at God's command and carry out the exodus. They function well with each other, but when their sister Miriam transgresses her designated female role, they reject her and expel her outside the camp. Much later when the people demand a king, God once again overlooks birth order and chooses David, a younger brother still tending the flock. God is apparently not bound by patriarchal rules in God's vocational invitations and choices.

The stories of brothers in the New Testament are nearly as convoluted. Among the twelve, Jesus calls two sets of brothers, Andrew and Simon and James and John, the sons of Zebedee. The latter pair's ambitious mother tries to secure them equal and powerful places in the kingdom at the right and left the hand of Jesus, much to the dismay of all the other disciples. This maternally inspired attempt to secure fraternal power for these brothers elicits Jesus' contrasting teaching on power through the example of the little child. Jesus' prophetic approach to power is one of humility and service, not domination and exaltation, a lesson his community still has some difficulty learning.

The New Testament also includes the parable of the prodigal son and his resentful elder brother. This story subverts once again the cultural world, in which power or prominent benefit only the eldest son. In the parable, the prodigal father, who loves both sons and deeply feels the loss

of his wayward son, painfully discovers his first-born son's resentment when he restores his younger son to the family. It is sad that the older brother is unable to recognize and live in the embrace of his father's love for him because he chafes under the role of the dutiful, responsible son.

New Testament Teachings Related to Brotherhood

In the New Testament, Jesus subverts the rules of patriarchy in this remarkable cultural, social, and religious world. As Jesus grows in his boldness in proclaiming the loving and universal love of Abba, God, he calls his followers: disciples (learners), brothers, (Mt. 23.8) servants, (Jn. 13.16) and friends (Jn. 15.15.). They confer on him the corresponding titles and roles of *rabbi* (teacher) and *kyrios* (master) but grow much more slowly into friends and brothers. The last supper discourse in John's Gospel draws the disciples ever more firmly into the divine family—into this fundamental relationship of being a child of God, a brother or sister of Jesus, and, of course of one another.

In Romans 8, Paul is no less insistent on this new theological identity. "All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." We have "received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba'! Father! It is that very Sprit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children then heirs with Christ." (Rom. 8. 14-18). In Romans, Paul continues describing Jesus as the "firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8.29). At its very least the spirituality of brotherhood is rooted in this fundamental relationship with brother Jesus, drawn into intimacy and friendship with him, but also into the Trinity itself. This relationship is brought about by God's pouring forth the Spirit into our hearts, bringing about this new familiar relationship. As brothers and sisters of Jesus, we are then brothers and sisters of one another and with all humanity, since God's embrace is universal.

Religious Brothers

The Post-Synodal document on religious life, *Vita Consecrata,* affirms the development of understandings of universal brotherhood, rooted in this experienced Trinitarian adoption, as fundamental theologically to the spirituality of brotherhood. The synod made the recommendation that a new terminology is adopted to differentiate the lay faithful from vowed brothers by designating their communities, "religious institutes of brothers."(1996. 60) The term "brother" suggests a rich spirituality.

> "These religious are called to be brothers of Christ, deeply united with him, 'the firstborn among many brothers'(Rom 8.29), brothers to one another, in mutual love and working together in the Church in the same service of what is good; brothers to everyone, in their witness to Christ's love for all, especially the lowliest, the neediest; brothers for a greater brotherhood in the Church," (*V.C.*#60).

Within the ecclesial community, religious institutes of brothers most clearly embody and espouse this core relationship rooted in the Gospel of the fundamental relationship of all Christians with one another and with all of humanity since Vatican II extended the concern of the church to embrace the joys and hopes, suffering and pain of the entire human family. What does religious consecration add to the spirituality of being a brother beyond the witness of the lay faithful?

It is central to the profession of religious consecration that religious renounce the most ordinary relationships of family life. As a life-form, it sublimates the human instinct for sexual partnering and for establishing one's biological family. Instead of leaving parents and family of origin to establish one's family, religious brothers espouse a way of loving in which one's primary affective, relational bonding is with Christ—brother Jesus.

This primary contemplative and affective relationship with Christ forms the basis for a potentially more inclusive way of loving others based on this spiritual relationship rather than on biological, ethnic, or national ties. Metaphors from ordinary family life expand family to include the whole human family. Those who have chosen to relate to others primarily beyond one's personal family become "brother" to those who are on the margins, those without family, the orphans, the abandoned, the radically brotherless. This more inclusive and spiritual form of brothering is first learned and developed within the religious community itself. By learning how to be a brother to one another across the differences that exist among the members of the community in the company of brother, Jesus, they embody this new principle of brotherly relationship and communion. Brought into the family of God by baptism, and called to relate to one another in the community so that strangers become brothers, Jesus makes everyone siblings to one another. The life of religious brothers manifests the brotherhood and sisterhood of all in the Christian community and beyond as their fundamental relationship within the human community.

It is important within this relational metaphor of brother to remember that in this family, no one is "father" save God. This new relationship of being a brother to those who are without anyone to love them in this way is an adult intentional reality. In the new community, no one may usurp the role of "mother" or "father." The rejection of relationships of domination and violence is implicit in forming a community of adult brothers who attempt to live as one. As Psalm 133 extols, "How very good and pleasant, it is when brothers live together in unity!" This is a rare achievement. Religious life is an adult commitment. If both community and ministry are to be genuinely prophetic, this life must originate from an adult, critical consciousness that creates a genuinely alternative reality—a radical fraternal relationship that departs from patriarchal conditioning and overcomes it.

Healing the Wounds of Patriarchy

On the one hand, to live out the promise of this new brotherhood, the boyhood wounds of the men who form this new community require some conscious healing. Otherwise, religious brotherhoods will replicate the rivalries, wounding, competition, and violence that are so often part of growing up for young men. Brothers hurt one another and constrain one another as well as support, defend, challenge, and care for one another.

Egalitarian Relating

On the other hand, men attracted to religious institutes of brothers are very often already critical of clericalism and consciously or semi-consciously seek a different way of being of service and of living in the community. As Sean Sammon states:

> "In reality, contemporary brotherhoods are multifaceted and pluralistic; diversity and an egalitarian manner of relating characterize their memberships. Brothers take offense when summarily dismissed as being a part of a hierarchical and patriarchal male system of thought and action." (cited by Thomas Johnson, FSC, 1993, p. 15)

This radical egalitarian identity of brothers is very difficult to maintain within the larger culture and ecclesial culture. The conflation of leadership and jurisdiction with the ritual role of liturgical leadership of clerics has eroded the original egalitarian fabric of a "community of equals" that appears in many New Testament texts. Even during this dynamic period of development in the church, evidence in the texts suggest that Jesus'

radically egalitarian approach to ministry and community was difficult for the first church communities to sustain, and under the influence of the surrounding cultures and their structures, created over the first three centuries patriarchal and hierarchical structures of governance within the church.

Vatican II attempted to reposition the laity about clergy as sharing distinct responsibilities within the ecclesial community and taught they were called to the one holiness. This reemergence of the laity within the community both assuming ministry within the church as well as carrying its mission outward to the world has largely served to displace both non-clerical men and women religious whose function within the church had assumed a quasi-clerical status. These forms of consecrated life were largely seen by the community, and sometimes by themselves as well, as a labor force meeting the educational, health, and social needs of the community. The "being" aspect of their lives was obscured. Once the lay faithful realized they could serve in these same "works," religious have struggled to establish a new identity within the community apart from the functions of service, they rendered.

This development only heightened the confusion for religious brothers. Brothers had already clearly responded to a religious calling that was not clerical, that was not primarily liturgical, and that was often more pragmatic in its style of service than the clerical role. Brothers did things. They taught, they farmed, they cared for the sick, and they built things. And they did all these concrete and practical ministries together. Theirs was a corporate response. They wanted to live and work side by side, shoulder to shoulder. They wanted to do all this somehow for God.

This choice was rarely understood very well by others because implicitly everyone knew that the clergy role was the more powerful, the more esteemed, the more public, and the privileged religious role for men in the church.

It is only possible to describe the spirituality of brotherhood as the community gradually tried to reclaim the egalitarian relationships that characterized the early Christian community. And then the ecclesial community tends to claim it for everyone, rendering religious men and women invisible when the laity, too, embraces this same ideal. Somehow the art of living intentional community and of joining in a shared charism of service, all of which is grounded in deepening and focused contemplation is harder to represent. How life is oriented and structured

by one's deepening relationship with brother Jesus and extends to all who are brother and sister to Jesus is harder to articulate and symbolize.

Challenge of Clericalism

One of the reasons it is so difficult to present a clear identity within the church community, is the pervasiveness of clericalism and its symbiosis with patriarchy that maintains clerical privilege and clerical (male) domination of the rest of the church, counter-signing in real and symbolic ways the efforts of the community itself to shift more fully toward its egalitarian identity. In 1983, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men in the United States commissioned a working paper on the topic of clericalism, "In Solidarity and Service: Reflections on the Problem of Clericalism in the Church." The leadership group prophetically recognized how clericalism negatively affected first "the attitudes and assumptions between priests and brothers and the relationships between them. Reflection on this experience led them to note an equally adverse impact on relationships with women religious and lay people." (p. 1)

Their working definitions of clericalism and of patriarchal culture remain elegant and clarifying in the conflicts that continue within the church community today because there has been no real structural change separating jurisdiction from ordination. If anything, the recent liturgical norms lean toward increasing clericalization symbolically in the Eucharistic context. CMSM defined clericalism:

> …the conscious or unconscious concern to promote the particular interests of the clergy and to protect the privileges and power that have traditionally been conceded to those in the clerical state. There are attitudinal, behavioral and institutional dimensions to the phenomenon of clericalism. Clericalism arises from both personal and social dynamics, is expressed in various cultural forms, and often is reinforced by institutional structures. Among its chief manifestations are an authoritarian style of ministerial leadership, a rigidly hierarchical world view, and a virtual identification of the holiness and grace of the church with the clerical state and, thereby, with the cleric himself. As such, clericalism is particularly evident in the ordained clergy, though it does not pertain exclusively to it. (p.2)

Clericalism enables ordained ministers, to "appeal to the structures and expectations of office in the church to justify inappropriate attitudes and behavior that are ultimately counter-productive for the church's life and mission." (p.2) The writers of this position paper recognize that non-clerics may exhibit these same traits within certain situations when they

justify their behavior by a claim to special religious expertise, ecclesial authority, or on their role or status in the church.

This paper astutely makes the link between clericalism and patriarchal social structures and described how psychological and social factors conspired to legitimate and reinforced clericalism. They name particularly clerical socialization, expectations of the laity that reinforce clericalism, and relationships between men and women. (p. 8)

> Patriarchal culture is characterized by several features: the institutionalization of male privilege and power and an accompanying social mythology to account for it: the social and cultural inequality of men and women and the assumption that this represents the appropriate (even God-given) pattern for all social relationships: and the formation and legitimation of vertical structures of power that are based on the presumed superiority and inferiority of given classes of people. . . . Male authoritarianism and elitism continue to mark every level of social relationship. (p.8)

Through the years of renewal, brothers, already critical of the clericalism from which they have suffered,also recognized their need to relinquish the benefits of being males in patriarchal cultures and of consciously striving to heal the damage to one another caused by male patriarchal, if not clerical, assumptions within the community and operative in their relationships with others in ministry.

Spirituality of Brotherhood as Resistance to Clericalism

There are several ways of looking at how this might affect a spirituality of brotherhood. As brothers deepened the appreciation of their unique vocation to be brothers in a universal and inclusive way, they chose to reject the vestiges of clericalism among them in terms of authoritarian styles of leadership and adopted a collegial and collaborative style within their communities as well as within their ministries. They not only attempted to address their relationship to the clergy. In mixed communities of brothers and priests, many of these communities restored the centrality of the brotherhood to the common life and changed governance structures enabling brothers to assume governance roles in these mixed communities. They also rather courageously broke long-standing taboos against "coming out" in celibate communities as gay or bi-sexual and sought to form a community by an orientation toward celibacy rather than on presumed sexual identities. These developments

required working through the homophobia of the heterosexual men in the communities as well as the internalized homophobia many gay men struggle with as well. Everyone had the opportunity for overcoming stereotypical views of one another and of deepening the bonds of brotherhood by shared faith, a shared religious life, emotional transparency and real relationship. Also, many brothers began to understand, that who they were as brothers and how they related to others precisely in this brotherly way was far more significant than the particular tasks they performed (2001, Armstrong, 15-22).

To achieve a more relational masculine identity that was as free as possible from domination requires men to question the patriarchal attitudes that deeply shape a man's sense of his masculinity in most cultures. They begin to heal the wounds of patriarchy that inhibit both spiritual development and relational development in many men.

Contribution of Masculine Psychology to a Spirituality of Brotherhood

There seem to be some constants in the psychological development of men that appear to follow a consistent pattern of connection to women (mother, first) followed by a necessary separation from women at each masculine developmental stage. Although establishing a masculine gender identity for boys necessarily requires moving away from the feminine, some theorists are convinced the process does not need to be so damaging to men. (Shea) The men's spirituality movement has pretty much established that most adult men still suffer from their boyhood wounds, inflicted by peers and fathers as almost constitutive of masculinity. As a result of the losses experienced in boyhood and often the physical and emotional pain inflicted upon them, they learn to cut off their feelings and so lose touch with the rich world of interiority accessible only through the affective domain.

The feeling that is allowed in men by men is anger that often progresses to verbal or physical violence. Men who are either hurting or afraid rapidly shift into anger rather than deal with the pain or the feelings and learn from them. Men's groups try to create a safe space so they can reach the pain beneath the anger. This allows men to mourn a relationship many men never had but desired with their dads and to stop the resulting cycle of male inflicted violence on one another and the women and children in their domestic or work environments.

Since boys need to learn how to be men from their dads or other male mentors, current psychological work with boys advocates dads and male mentors modeling emotional attachment, modeling more ways to be masculine, encouraging boys to experience the full range of feelings as "manly" and so to be better able to communicate instead of act out, teaching that emotional courage is courage and not weakness, recognize their need for activity and help them find safe boy places in which to be physical and active, using discipline to build character, not enemies, and talking to boys in their language—drawing them out and including them in projects to which they can contribute (2004, Hart, 74-5, summarizesKindlon and Thompson, 1999). If religious brothers have navigated their own male spiritual and emotional development well, their "brotherly" role in the Christian community will be even more effective with the boys and younger men they work with.

There is great healing potential for the whole church when men consciously choose to embrace a masculine spirituality that renounces the distortions fostered in men by patriarchy and who respond more adequately to the core tasks of achieving manhood. This means coming to terms with sexuality, power, and money, and offer a genuine alternative model of masculine holiness to the world community. Such spirituality would lead men, as brothers, to supply a missing form of masculine energy and more authentic masculine relational skills to those lacking fathers or brothers with those capacities. These fathers may either be missing through incarceration, working far from home, or insufficiently healed of their masculine wounding to be able to help their sons.

In addition to this relational work with boys and young men, a spirituality of brotherhood might also claim the spiritual dimension of work of all kinds. Rather than sliding into the temptation to replace relationships with a compulsive need to work, brothers model a concrete engagement with the world through their ministries. Work participates in God's creativity, care, and labor in the creation (Fox, 1994 and Palmer,1990). Work is more than purely instrumental or necessity. It is often an expression of self in the world of action. When the work is intrinsically satisfying, it contributes to sense the meaningfulness of one's life. Those who teach often experience long periods of delay in seeing the fruit of their labor, requiring tenacity, long-suffering, and hope. And at the same time, teaching is intrinsically rewarding. Work builds strengths in collaboration and teamwork.

Brotherly men may demonstrate positive, collaborative masculine relationships with women that are non-exploitive and non-predatory. In their capacity to relate as a brother to women as friend or sister, they relate as a peer, a sibling, an equal—able to engage in give-and-take and mutual learning and challenge, care and consideration.

Because men will continue to receive projections of power, a spirituality of brotherhood embraces a spirituality of downward mobility from models of "power over" others and chooses to relate and work in solidarity with others. Rather than resorting to violence in the face of frustration or threat, a spirituality of brotherhood leads to practices of non-violence demonstrating a more courageous rather than less courageous way of exerting masculine influence in troubled situations. Along the lines advocated by the CMSM position paper cited above, a spirituality of brotherhood continually recognizes and seeks to heal the wounds of patriarchy and clericalism, relinquishes dominating power for "power with" and "power for" the most vulnerable. When a rich inner world of feeling is recovered and expressed, communication of ones' hopes, dreams, desires, values, and interior experiences of ordinary life, as well as the wealth of one's interior spiritual experience and the meanings that sustain commitment and service, builds new forms of connection and community. In today's church, this spirituality of brotherhood lived by men out of a freshly developing masculine spirituality is truly prophetic, offering an alternative way of worshiping, living, working, relating from within the shared, graced perspective of a community of coequals, brothers to all, called to one and the same holiness, across all the divisions that divide the human community.

References

Armstrong, C.S.C., P. (July 23-26, 1999).Until…A Confession of Brotherhood, *Spes Unica Vocation Symposium*. Notre Dame: Brothers of Holy Cross. (15-22).

Armstrong, C.S.C., P. (2001). Who is Brother? Review for Religious 60.1 (30-39).

Fox, M. (1994). *The Reinvention of Work: A New Vision of Livelihood for Our Time.* San Francisco, Harper.

Gallianza, C.S.C., J. (1999). 'Come Closer. I Am Your Brother:' Being and Doing Brotherhood, *Review for Religious* 58.pp. 481-89.

Hart, T. (2004).*What Does it Mean to Be A Man?* Mahwah: Paulist.

Johnson, F.S.C. (2003). 'Who Do They Say That I Am?'The Religious Brother and the Identity of Religious. *CMSM Forum* 87.Fall, pp. 7-18.

Kindlon, D., & Thompson, M. (1999). *The Emotional Life of Boys.* New York: Ballantine. (Cited by Hart)

John Paul II. (1996). *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father John Paul II: Vita Consecrata.* Boston: Pauline Books and Media.

Kindlon, D. and Thompson, M. (1999). *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*. New York: Ballantine. (Cited by Hart.)

Palmer, P. (1990). *TheActive Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring.* San Francisco: Harper Row.

In Solidarity and Service: Reflections on the Problem of Clericalism in the Church (April 8, 1983). *CMSM, Documentation.* Washington, D.C.: Conference of Major Superiors of Men.

Sammon, S. (1993). Cited by Philip Armstrong, CSC. (2003). Who Do You Say That I Am?: The Religious Brother and the Identity of Religious" CMSM Forum.

Shea, O.S.A., J. (1998). "Masculine Spirituality," his contribution to "Feminine and Masculine Spirituality" workshops based on developmental psychology we presented together in the U.S. and Ireland. (unpublished).

Vita Consecrata: Post-*Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father John Paul II* Consecrated Life. Boston: Pauline Books, 1996.