

Abstract

‘Renewing Fatherhood’: An Everyday Theology of Fatherhood for the Church

By

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In recent years, the dizzying pace of technological, socio-cultural and economic change has placed unprecedented pressures on the family unit, as traditionally conceived. This has left the historic and primal institution of fatherhood in a state of flux as, together with wider society, men ask what does it mean to be a father in this complex cultural landscape?

This dissertation seeks to explore, what the biblical and theological tools are, that might both restore and renew a high culture of fathering in the church and in society. Ultimately, it encourages the Church of Ireland to take seriously the need to engage with men in their role as fathers as part of the prophetic mandate the Malachi speaks about of turning, ‘the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers’ (Malachi 4:6).

This dissertation takes seriously the broader socio-cultural reality of fatherhood and argues that the principles of involvement, nurture and care embodied in the idea of ‘new fatherhood’ are consonant with the overarching biblical vision of fatherhood. It argues that God’s Fatherhood serves as the ‘divine critique’ of all human fatherhood. Ultimately, from careful biblical exegesis and sound theological insight, we can argue that, the father is called not to act as a distant patriarch but as an involved, loving, compassionate and self-sacrificial father who, in leading his family, puts their interests first. It concludes by encouraging the Church to have confidence in the message about fatherhood it carries and proclaim that truth with confidence and fervour.