

The French Revolution

Real Men Take the Lead

Feminized Man, Child Man, or Real Man -- make the choice.

By David French, March 27, 2011

"My wife would never let me do that."

I can't tell you how many times I've heard those words. Most commonly, I hear it when I discuss some of our more extreme family choices of the past five years, like joining the Army Reserves, volunteering to deploy to Iraq, serving for a year during the Surge in Diyala Province, the extensive travel of my civilian job, and even my thriving video game hobby and all-around science fiction geekery.

My response is simple: "Have you even tried to ask?" The answer is almost always negative. There's a look of resignation, and we move on.

Kay Hymowitz's fascinating new book, *Manning Up*, highlights the crisis of masculinity in this country. Something has gone wrong with the American male. We're increasingly less educated than women, we're hit harder by the recession, and we're far less likely to attend church. Simply put, we often don't know our role in a highly feminized (or feminist-ized) two-earner society.

This crisis is the inevitable result of a cultural progression that began with the "feminized man," has moved to the "child man," and will end up with a country littered (even more than it already is) with broken families, lost economic potential, and relational dysfunction.

The "feminized man" represents the perfect storm of collaboration between radical feminism and a particularly sappy and sentimental Christianity that dominates many of our evangelical churches. What do feminists and evangelicals have in common? Both factions increasingly re-classify typically masculine characteristics (say, aggression or adventurousness) as vices and typically feminine characteristics (such as emotionalism or an emphasis on relationships) as virtues.

The result is a strange form of "female emotional porn" (my wife's phrase), where the ideal man becomes—in many essential ways—a woman: emotionally available, always eager to talk, never afraid to shed a tear, and ready, willing, and able to shoulder the household workload. I can't tell you how many times I've been to Christian conferences or sat through sermons where I've been told that "real men" should behave exactly like that, that "real men" have the "courage" to set aside their emotional distance, to approach their wife emotionally and say "no" to their careers.

They're told to be "Christlike" by pastors or Sunday School teachers who imagine a feminized Christ, a Jesus always washing feet (or giving foot-rubs) and never clearing out temples, a Jesus of gentle words and not fierce anger, a Jesus always serving, never leading.

But the model fails. Utterly. As literally millions of embittered men can attest, they can strive for female-defined emotional perfection all they want, but not only will they fail to reach their goal, they will often find themselves objects of rejection and scorn—sexless marriages to contemptuous women who dominate the home ("Let me check with the boss" is a husband's common semi-joking response to any question

about a day or weekend away from home). No one is happy: neither the wives who abandon their husbands with increasing frequency, nor the husbands who have surrendered their very nature in a futile quest for cultural conformity.

The result of this frustration is all too often the man-child, an often-nihilistic, frequently slothful, aimless, honor-less connoisseur of casual relationships, a slacker-rebel who has given up on virtues and indulges in vices. Ironically, this man-child doesn't necessarily lack for female attention. The aggressive man-child loves and leaves, indifferent to others' emotions, in a constant search for the next conquest. The passive man-child shrugs his shoulders at the nagging and fires up the Playstation as his longtime, live-in girlfriend heads off to work.

There's an alternative, of course, and the alternative is biblical. No, not the soft-spoken, ultra-sensitive version of "biblical" that dominates the evangelical small-group, but the robust, aggressive, and honorable example of the actual men of the Bible. There, men go to war at God's command. There, men face death, far from home, for the sake of Truth. There, men confront the powerful and call out injustice. There, men actually lead.

But there's more. It's not all aggression and confrontation. The picture is complex, with gentle moments amongst the harsh, with great tenderness and, yes, deep emotion mixed with necessary stoicism and steely determination. You lay down your very life for your family, even as you lead it—and you lead it with the same authority that Christ leads His church.

I'm so far from the ideal man that I can't even see him through the high-powered scope of my assault rifle, but I do know this: following God's call is not a matter of your wife—or any woman's—"permission," and our self-worth is never defined by female regard. After all, we've been given a mission statement, and that mission stands apart from and above any human demands:

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Note: Kay Hymowitz's book was also reviewed by Patheos columnist J. E. Dyer.

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