

IL PADRE L'ASSENTE INACCETTABILE

The Father: The Unacceptable Absent (2013)

"If what mortals desire could come true, first I would wish for the return of the father": Telemachus in the Odyssey. Today legions share this anguish. A diffused nostalgia for the paternal gaze — a father who sees you, smiles, occasionally corrects. A father more courageous in affections, unafraid to do his job.

Risé, Jungian psychoanalyst, diagnoses contemporary Western society as a **"society without fathers."** The paternal figure — who links individual biography to the transcendent plane and teaches the meaning of loss and pain — has been eclipsed by secularization, easy divorce, abortion laws that exclude fathers, and the disappearance of initiation rites. The result: widespread psychological regression, inability to integrate suffering, and cultural pathologies. Yet nostalgia persists, and with it hope for the responsible father's return.

I. THE SIGN OF THE FATHER

The sign of the father is **the wound** — the pain of loss. On Golgotha the Son is struck in the Father's name. The father initiates the child into the sense of pain and teaches that life includes loss, lack, and fatigue. The deepest experiences, beginning with love, take form from that loss. The father's first function is to interrupt the mother-child symbiosis (necessary until it becomes anti-vital) and propose a direction, a *télos*. He "wounds" to make stronger.

In the Grimms' *Iron Hans*, the child loses the golden ball (symbol of psychic totality) — the educational process limits and forms. Whoever receives the paternal sign bears a deep, cicatrized wound that makes future losses endurable and even fruitful: they yield love, for self and others. The sign is also initiation (like Confirmation): it strengthens and humanizes.

The father must himself be a "bearer of the wound," initiated by his own father. As in Canetti's Bushman legend: the son recognizes the approaching grandfather by feeling the corresponding point of the old wound in his own body. The wound is the intergenerational link. Without it, loss remains an inexplicable injury, protested in courts or clinics, never transformed into dignity.

Separation from the Mother & Initiation Rites. The first wound is separation from maternal symbiosis. The child lives in fusion from conception; the psyche eventually experiences it as suffocating. Birth ends corporeal symbiosis, but full psychological separation unfolds over the first seven years. In every culture this is a communal event. The Kurnai rite (Australia): men take boys from mothers' arms and lift them repeatedly toward the sky. The gesture consecrates them to the celestial God and places them on the vertical axis — from horizontal matter (needs satisfied by mother) to transcendent search for self and the Other, at the center of the cross where man reaches toward God and finds himself.

Western society, for the first time in history, has abolished initiations. It wants growth without wounds or losses, fearing the vertical (the denied God). Children remain on the ground, eternal infants on the horizontal plane of need, marked by depression and neurosis. The price of refusing paternal separation and elevation is renunciation of an adult society.

I. THE SIGN OF THE FATHER (continued)

Renunciation of Omnipotence & the Search for Norms (ADHD). Entering relation with the father (bearer of the norm), the child experiences not being omnipotent, being bound to rules sometimes painful. This painful acceptance frees from anxiety. The spoiled child, shielded from limit and prohibition, becomes restless and challenges authority — desperately seeking containment and a Law. The antiauthoritarian experiments around 1968 proved the point: without norms children became depressed or regressed into psychotic disorganization. The principle of authority is constitutive of personality.

Unsatisfied demand for norms generates ADHD — treated with Ritalin and Prozac. What was once "lively child" managed by traditional discipline (narcissistic wounds that absorbed excess energy) is now medicalized. Lack of fundamental containments produces anxiety and self-esteem deficits so severe that psychotherapy itself becomes impossible; drugs become inevitable.

Absence of the experience of loss generates anxiety. Conscious knowledge of loss (the "lost" omnipotent mother-child unity) dissolves omnipotence anxiety and the modern delusion of immortality.

Mythic Illustrations: Aeneas and Icarus. In the *Aeneid* everything is loss — Troy, Dido — shared with the father. Anchises' presence (first physical, then from the Underworld) gives Aeneas capacity to build the future, Rome. The father witnesses original loss and guarantees the new project. In the myth of Daedalus and Icarus, the father transmits renunciation: fly neither too high (sun melts wax) nor too low (sea wets feathers). Icarus, refusing measure and the middle path between earth and heaven, falls. The Great Mother (Pasiphae, Crete) imprisons; the father liberates toward transcendence — but only through sacrifice and mediation (the Cross). Eternal children cannot accept this and perish.

II. THE FATHER AND GOD

Paternal intervention realizes Ricoeur's "gaze turned toward the future, from the idea of a task to pursue." The father brings direction through renunciation of chaos and evil, linking the paternal relation indissolubly to spiritual experience and exit from horizontal matter. "The essence and action of God are paternity" (Cordes). The father reconciles the individual — who has known loss — with the world, recognizing its richness.

Creator, Freedom, Future, Custodian. The father is first felt as creator ("You created my inmost being..." Psalm 138). He knows the child to the depths and accompanies destiny, breaking solitude. Without significant paternal experience, tranquil entrustment to life as manifestation of God is impossible. The creator father also assures **freedom**: he subtracts the person from familial/neurotic conditionings, making him "other" than the sum of pathologies. Being sons of the Father means being potentially free and responsible for one's condition.

The father is **custodian** (St. Joseph model in *Redemptoris Custos*): protector who inserts the child "ordered" into the world, respects divine and human laws, and guards the possibility of regeneration the child carries. He trains to work (Joseph the carpenter sanctifies labor by transmitting trade to Jesus) and exercises loving **correction** — containing undifferentiated drives and directing them toward human growth. "As a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you" (Deut 8). Correction transforms fusion into distinction, cuts the symbiotic cord, and enables interiorization of a positive paternal image. It is indispensable for will development and for becoming fathers ourselves. Paternal love includes reproach and discipline (Hebrews 12; Rev 3:19). Modernity transferred correction to the State, stripping it of love.

Key Insight: Therapeutic apparatuses are often hostile to the father because a strong paternal relation produces freer, stronger individuals less dependent on therapy. The fatherless person sinks into debased matter and weakened religious experience, becoming prey to mass pathologies and substitute "fathers."

III. THE WEST MOVES AWAY FROM THE FATHER

The revolutionary desecration of Notre-Dame and Saint-Denis (kings of Judah/Israel beheaded, miraculous statues burned, bells melted for cannons) dramatized a process long underway: expulsion of the sacred from daily life. Secularization broke the traditional image of man (human reality united with religious world) and reduced life to the horizontal plane of phenomena (Durand, Eliade).

Luther and the Reformation played a decisive role. By secularizing marriage (placing it in the "Kingdom of the world" under jurists and reason, not the Church), Luther opened the door to statalization of paternity and transfer of educational responsibility from father to mother/educator. The father ceased to be witness of the divine norm in the family; he became economic provider. Protestant pedagogy and industrial success-culture devalued paternal simplicity, manual skill, and courage in favor of intellectual "clean" achievement. The father was reduced to performer (sexual/financial) whose failure leads to expulsion from home.

Disappearance of Initiation & Education of Aggressiveness. For the first time in masculine history, men are initiated not by fathers or masculine figures but by mothers and feminine helpers. The paternal wound (separating from mother) and all rites evoking it have been abolished. In OECD countries, early childhood and elementary teachers are ~94% female; the trend is irreversible. Instinctual, material, and spiritual culture cannot be learned from books; it is transmitted through lived shared presence. The "irresponsible" father is usually himself fatherless — never taught by silent paternal presence how to be a man and father. He transmits money, not gender culture or responsibility.

Social cost: progressive loss of capacity to control and positively direct aggressiveness (central to traditional initiation). Without paternal transmission of the transformative mission (the child as "Redeemer" who changes the world), young men become census numbers without direction. Energy meant for transformation turns destructive — against self or others. Kenya's post-ban rape incident and Western youth crime statistics illustrate the vacuum.

IV. THE 'DIVORCE FACTORY' AND ITS WAR ON THE FATHER

Paternal absence arises concretely from separations and divorces that almost always expel fathers from the home and rupture (or gravely weaken) their relationship with children — plus abortion legislation that, for the first time in history, silences the father on procreation. The "divorce factory" (legal, cultural, economic, psychological mechanisms) systematically marginalizes the father: custody presumptions favoring mothers, maintenance systems that reduce him to check-writer, and a climate of suspicion (economic exploitation, manipulation, abuse) that renders every paternal gesture potentially criminal. Real stories abound of dedicated fathers suddenly cut off, reduced to visitors or eliminated entirely.

The American case shows a society with easy divorce, massive legal/therapeutic apparatus around breakdown, and generations of fatherless children with elevated criminality, depression, school failure, and relational incapacity. Italy shows anachronisms and confusions on children's backs. An appendix collects the absurdities and injustices of dominant divorce culture. The machinery, while claiming to serve the child's "best interest," produces fatherless children and broken men at enormous individual and collective cost.

V. PATHOLOGY OF THE FATHERLESS SOCIETY

A society without fathers does not know how to lose. Incapable of integrating loss (the paternal figure who teaches its meaning is absent), it reacts to every lack or wound with refusal, negation, or depression. Vendettas appear as youth criminality, epidemic depression/anxiety, narcissistic pathologies, and search for substitute strong fathers in ideologies or strongmen. Personality regresses to infantile levels: eternal adolescents refusing every limit and renunciation, demanding immediate gratification, incapable of responsibility, projecting discomfort onto others.

The adult psyche, without father and the logic of gift (gratuity transcending economic exchange), oscillates between grandiosity and victimhood. "Devouring" perversion (Great Mother archetype refusing separation) and sadistic perversion (wounding without transmitting meaning) are two faces of the same coin. Hyperconformism, sadistic aggression, soft violence, neurosis that steals freedom (obsessive control), and distraction strategies (drugs, pornography, compulsive consumption) are symptoms of a society that has lost the paternal compass and wanders in immanent labyrinth without transcendence.

Key Insight: Without the father who introduces the vertical axis and sense of sacrifice, the individual remains on the horizontal plane of need and consumption, prey to the "Great Mother" society promising total security but delivering total dependence. Denied wounds return as symptoms, compulsions, addictions. Distraction strategies only deepen the void they pretend to fill.

VI. REMOVAL AND USE OF DEATH IN THE SOCIETY OF THE 'ELIMINABLE FATHER'

In a society that has made the father "eliminable," death itself is removed or instrumentalized. The father taught how to die — how to integrate loss as passage. Without him, death becomes either absolute scandal to be denied (modern immortality delusion, medicalization of all discomfort, refusal of suffering as meaningless) or instrument of biopower deciding who may live and who may be pushed into death. Abortion is the most visible technique: father's word taken away in procreation decision; child eliminable without paternal consultation. Other forms exist: eugenic pressures, "quality of life" calculations abandoning elderly/disabled, demographic optimization treating life as variable.

Denied death returns as autonomous complex: obsessive fear of illness/aging, frantic safety-seeking that produces control society. Secularized death (pure cessation, no passage) deprives life of meaning: if death is nothing, why accept limits or suffer for something greater? Biopower's control over life finds perfect ally in a culture that has lost paternal sacrifice and the Cross as transformative wound.

VII. THE CHANGING WORLD: FROM 'ELIMINABLE' TO RESPONSIBLE FATHER

Signs of reaction are multiplying, especially among the young and those who suffered fatherlessness directly. **It is better to marry** — rediscovery of stable commitment that resists time and difficulty. The **revolt of the "children of divorce"** is underway: a generation saying it does not want to repeat the pattern. **Covenant marriage** laws introduce more binding contracts with longer reflection and stricter divorce conditions. Growing awareness that excluding the father from life decisions is anthropologically absurd. Scotland's "boys who become fathers" shows young males, when supported, can assume responsibility and grow through it.

Joint/shared custody laws mark decisive progress: no automatic maternal primacy, but recognition that both parents (absent proven unfitness) have right and duty to continue their role. The step forward is **assumption of responsibility** — fathers who refuse expulsion, claim their place out of love and awareness of what they transmit. Italy's appeal "For the Father" gathers reasons for cultural and legislative change restoring dignity and space to the paternal figure.

The movement is from the "eliminable" father (society can do without him; his absence presented as progress) to the **responsible father**: conscious, present, capable of wounding with love, initiating, transmitting limit and transcendence, bridging child and divine Father.

CONCLUSION: NOSTALGIA, HOPE, AND THE RETURN OF THE FATHER

Risé offers a passionate, documented diagnosis of one of modernity's deepest wounds: the eclipse of the father. The father is not optional; he is the one who, by inflicting the first loving wound of separation and transmitting its meaning, enables passage from symbiosis to subjectivity, from fusion to freedom, from horizontal need to vertical meaning and transcendence. A fatherless society is a society without initiation, without loved norms, without capacity to integrate loss and transform it into gift. It regresses to infantile levels and seeks in consumption, entertainment, and addictions a substitute for the missing paternal gaze.

Yet nostalgia remains — and with it hope. The man keeping his father's photo on the nightstand, the children of divorce in revolt, laws recognizing joint custody, fathers refusing expulsion, young people seeking a different masculinity: all signal that the paternal archetype is repressed, not dead. What is repressed returns — often distorted, but also, if welcomed, in forms of healing and renewal. "These pages want to accompany this nostalgia... The intention is to contribute to a hope: that the father may return."

KEY INSIGHTS FOR FATHERS & WORKSHOPS

1. Do not fear inflicting the loving wound of limit, loss, and renunciation. It is the most precious gift — what makes children strong and capable of loving.
2. Support maternal role while firmly helping children exit symbiosis. Your "otherness" is essential for their psychological birth.
3. Transmit through lived presence (work, silence, shared activity) what cannot be learned from books: responsibility, courage, instinctual knowledge, sense of the sacred in ordinary life.
4. Your relation with God/meaning is the most powerful education. Pray with them; show suffering can have meaning. Without the vertical, children remain imprisoned in the horizontal.
5. Reclaim loving correction — clear judgment that calls to growth. Children need "no" said with love more than endless affirmation.
6. Presence over performance. What children need most is attentive, consistent, embodied presence in ordinary moments.
7. Even in difficulty or separation, refuse the role of eliminable father. Fight legitimately for your place. Joint custody is anthropological necessity.
8. The nostalgia you and your children feel is the sign the archetype lives. By becoming the father you can be — wounded but healing, limited but loving — you participate in cultural and spiritual renewal.

Summary prepared for reflection on fatherhood, positive discipline, and Catholic family spirituality. Original Italian text © Edizioni San Paolo. This condensation is for personal/educational use.