

WHAT IS MASCULINITY?

The new emphasis on men, while encouraging, is not all good. Poet Robert Bly's book *Iron John* stayed on the best-seller list 30 weeks this year. Bly has been the one to inspire many men to head off into the woods on weekends, where they stand around campfires, pounding on their chests like gorillas and uttering primordial screams in an effort to regain their lost masculinity.

Another book, however, takes a different—and godly—approach to the re-establishment of manhood. It is Len LeSourd's *Strong Men, Weak Men*.

During his 28 years as editor of *Guideposts* magazine, LeSourd interviewed hundreds of people. One cultural change in particular struck him: While women seemed to be growing in their sense of identity, men were losing strength. Today, LeSourd says, men may appear either as "macho" or "wimpy" on the outside; but inside they are frozen—unsure of who they are—living unbalanced, incomplete, unfulfilled lives.

What does it mean to be a man in today's society? Should he continue the age-old pattern of being "strong" and aloof, always keeping his emotions in check? Or, as LeSourd asks, is true masculinity something different?

Sadly, many men have lost their maleness. We see it especially in the ghettos of the inner city, where many men have abdicated their roles as father to that of being stud horse, impregnating wives and lovers with no intent to fulfill a daddy's responsibility.

Wholesome sitcoms like "The Cosby Show" have been slanted to try to give a healthy image to African Americans. Yet even Cosby's "Dr. Huxtable" is subordinate to his strong female counterpart—and his little girls always manage to wrap him around their fingers.

But abdication of maleness is not limited to a specific race of people. Among whites, in particular, it started with yuppies and then was passed along to the boomers. Unisex clothing and hairstyles make it difficult to tell men and women apart. It used to be if the creature had long hair, wore earrings and carried a purse it was a woman. Today that applies to a sizable number of men, as well. Even the masculine heroes of today are often dressed like women. Seeing famous athletes with loops through their ears is a case in point.

Earrings on men are not, emphasize *not*, ungodly. Nor is long hair. Nor is carrying a purse

ungodly. (It is just a sign your pants are too tight for pockets.) What these things do signify, however, is the breakdown in the separation between the male/female identities.

Now, because of Robert Bly and others, there is a countermovement against the feminist movements of the last few years. Men are seeking to regain their maleness. Fortunately, Christian men are not using Bly's theories of chanting, sweating and hollering—rather they are following LeSourd's principles of loving, caring and, yes, crying.

George Bush, in June, addressing more than 20,000 Southern Baptists in Atlanta, broke into tears.

En route to Atlanta aboard Air Force One, the president's aides had read through his prepared message. They expressed concern about one story he wanted to tell. It was the story of the night before the Gulf War began. That night, at Camp David in Maryland, the president and his wife got on their knees and prayed together—weeping over the responsibilities of sending brave men to possible death.

"Every time you tell that story, you break down," one of his aides warned him. "I can do it this time without crying," the president replied.

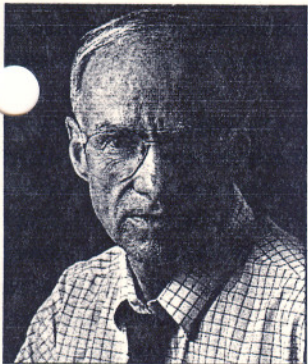
The aides didn't believe him. They remembered all those "wimp" accusations thrown at Bush during the campaign. They also knew that Bush occasionally weeps in private—when he talks about a soldier who lost his life in the Gulf War or his daughter who died of leukemia. They also remember that Edmund Muskie had to quit the 1972 presidential race after he broke down during the New Hampshire primary. Bush's aides were adamant that he keep himself under control.

But the memory was too much. When the president stood before the Baptists and recalled the prayer scene, tears began to slip from his eyes. "Here we go," he told the crowd.

How did they respond? They applauded him. Baptists, applauding the president of the United States for weeping in public.

The president has set a high standard for men. I welcome it. So do most Christian women I know. In fact, crying may be far more manly than beating our chests and uttering loud snorts. That's for monkeys. Men, real men, care enough to love—and to cry. ■

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