

## Priest - Spiritual Fatherhood

An individual asked me yesterday as to why we address our priests as “father.” He felt that it was an unbiblical practice as Jesus forbade it and quoted St. Matthew 23:9; “<sup>9</sup> And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.”

This question shook me and made me realise how diluted the teachings of Anglicanism has changed over the years. The answer to this very question was taught by our Senior Sunday School teachers in Sunday School – once we finished this level we went in for Confirmation Classes.

Well, here in I share with you what I was taught as I do not know how many in our Parish are aware of the reasoning that went in before Priests were called “Father”.

The most pointed New Testament reference to the theology of the “Spiritual Fatherhood” of Priests is in St. Paul’s statement, “<sup>14</sup> I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. <sup>15</sup> For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:14–15).

St. Peter followed the same convention, referring to Mark as his son: “<sup>13</sup> The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.” (1 St. Peter 5:13).

The Apostles sometimes referred to entire churches under their care as their “children”. St. Paul writes, “<sup>14</sup> Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.” (2 Corinthians 12:14); and, “<sup>19</sup> My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,” (Galatians 4:19).

St. John said, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:” (1 St. John 2:1); “<sup>4</sup> I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” (3 St. John 4). In fact, St. John also addresses men in his congregations as “fathers” (1 St. John 2:13–14).

By referring to these people as their spiritual sons and spiritual children, St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. John imply their own roles as Spiritual Fathers. Since the Bible frequently speaks of this Spiritual Fatherhood, we Anglicans acknowledge it and follow the custom of the Apostles by calling our priests “Father.”

**We, Anglicans, believe that failure to acknowledge this is a failure to recognize and honour a great gift God has bestowed on the Church: The “Spiritual Fatherhood” of the Priesthood - for Priest are to be Christ like in all their ways.**

Anglicans know that as members of a parish, they have been committed to a Priest’s Spiritual Care, thus they have great “personal” affection for their Priests and call them “father.” Priests, in turn, follow the Apostles’ Biblical example by referring to members of their flock as “my son” or “my child/children” (1 St. Pet. 5:13; 1 St. John 2:1; 3 St. John 4).

We earnestly believe that all of these passages were written in the Holy Bible under the motivation of the Holy Ghost, and therefore it expresses the reliable and recorded truth that; Jesus Christ's Priests must play the role of a "Spiritual Fathers".

Jesus is not against acknowledging that. It is He who gave these men their role as Spiritual Fathers, and it is His Holy Ghost that recorded this role for priests in the pages of our Scripture.

To acknowledge "Spiritual Fatherhood" is to acknowledge the truth, and no amount of protesting will change that fact.

Cecil K. Dewars  
Memorial Church Anglican  
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