

The Ideal Man

Taken from chapter fourteen in the Manuscript entitled,
ManMakers, by Pete Bertolero

“No man behaves as a compleat[sic]gentlemen all the time, but the best men never cease yearning to do so.”¹

G.K. Chesterton said something to the effect that it doesn't matter how often men may fall short in their efforts to imitate the ideal man, for even in failing in their attempts to do so they will have gained more higher moral ground than if they had not. In other words, a man who seeks to live his life on a higher moral plane, if and when he stumbles, will fall forward, not backward. Although it is true that not many men or boys will put forth such an effort to study the way of the ideal man, let alone put forth the effort to live their lives accordingly, Miner nails it when he writes

“...to live chivalrously – the yearning is a constant from one millennium to the next.”²

The idea or concept of the ideal man has been around, well, since woman was created. Every culture has had its favorite recipe for what constituted the ideal man, although in most cases, many of the ingredients that made up the vision for such a man were similar. Throughout this book I have referred to the code of chivalry as my default for the western vision of such a man, and the ideals of chivalry go back at least to the middle ages, although the concept of the ideal man, whether codified or not, has existed in every generation and people.

The concept of the ideal man is just that: a concept; an ideal unto which every man and boy should naturally aspire to. This is why some refer to the code of chivalry as “the spirit of chivalry” since it embodies things both conscious and unconscious, and is the stuff of dreams as well as deeds. No man has achieved this ideal except for one, and I will get to him in just a minute. Nevertheless, the belief in the importance of striving to embody such an ideal guarantees at least our living life on a higher plane. Miner quotes S.M. Crothers, who in 1898 said

“[A] gentlemen [the chivalrous, ideal man] if not the shape of every man, is the shape in which every man desires to appear to others. It is needless to remark that this aspiration is not always adequately fulfilled...All this is but to say that the word ‘gentleman’ represents an idea. Above whatever coarseness and sordidness there may be in actual life there rises the idea of a finer kind of man with gentler manners, truer speech and braver actions.”

To talk with other men about the virtues of the ideal man, which Miner calls “the conversation that never ends” and to pursue those ideals, has been the

¹ Brad Miner, The Compleat Gentlemen, p. 4

² Ibid

pass time and goal of men in every era. I have likened it to an old game me and my kids use to play by batting a large balloon around the living room or yard, keeping it from hitting the ground. The purpose of the game was to see how long everyone could keep the balloon off the ground by hitting it up into the air. The “conversation that never ends” is kept in circulation by those few men in every generation who will, through conversation, story, myth and principle, keep it alive and potent. John Adams wrote

“...there is a natural [governing body] of virtues and talents in every nation and in every party, in every city and village.”

Perhaps the best word picture we might use to describe the ideal man comes from the poet Carl Sandburg, who was the first to use the term *Steel and Velvet* when describing Abraham Lincoln. We will get back to Sandburg’s use of the term in a minute. But let me briefly develop the characteristics of steel and velvet first.

Characteristics of Steel

Throughout this book I have and will continue to talk about the virtues of the ideal man. At times, I highlight the steel part of such a man, and at other times, his velvet characteristics. In this chapter I would like to exclusively isolate these two different sides of the chivalrous man for the purpose of clarity. What are the characteristics that make up the steel part of a man’s character? When we think of steel, what characteristics do we associate with it? What comes to mind when you envision a rod of steel; a steel girder; a sword of steel? Steel is hard, strong, resilient and durable. It’s gets this way by being tempered. The steely characteristics of a man are likewise described by such words as strength; endurance and temperance. Aubrey Andelin envisions such a man as “a composite of manly sterling qualities.”³

Such a man assumes personal responsibility to work hard and provide for his family; to earn his way by the strength of his hand and sweat of his brow, as God intended. Such is his manly duty. He willingly rather than begrudgingly shoulders his masculine duty to serve, protect, provide and lead. He involves himself in his community and church, helping to build and strengthen both for the good of those within them. A man of steel carries a sense of social responsibility; he sees himself as built for others rather than himself. He contributes to the welfare of others. He’s a giver not a taker. He feels that it is part of his manly responsibility and moral obligation to leave the world in better shape than it was before he was born.

In Part Two of this book I will go in to detail about positive male aggression and empathy, but suffice it here to say that a manly man is aggressive, determined, decisive, efficient, demanding of himself, disciplined, and unrelenting in living out his convictions. The universal attributes of courage, self-sacrifice and self-mastery make up the steel side of a manly man. Such a man

³ Aubrey Andelin, *man of Steel and Velvet*, p. 11

rejects softness and timidity, passivity and indecisiveness. When it comes to standing up for what is right, he is as unbendable as a bar of steel. He stands firm under pressure and stress, and will not back down from an opponent, even if victory is not possible, since victory over himself is his greatest goal. He trains his body so that he can be both strong and able to defend himself and his family, as well as the weak, poor, women and children. He is fierce and unyielding in battle, merciful and gracious in victory.

Characteristics of Velvet

When we speak of a man's velvet qualities, things such as gentleness, compassion, kindness, empathy, and charity, and largesse (generosity) are at the forefront. A velvety man is a patient, caring man. He is honorable and attentive to women and children. He has the ability to love tenderly and gently. Such a man is meek (strength under control, and walks in humility, which Andelin aptly says subdues his masculine ego and refines his rough nature.

A Balance of Velvet and Steel

If we spoke of the ideal man as if he were a large, tall building, Andelin says the steel characteristics would serve as the sturdy framework made up of steel and concrete which serve to tie the building together, and anchor it to its foundation. Without the steel framework, the building could not hold up to the pressures of outside forces or the uses and purposes for which it was designed. On the other hand, the velvet characteristics relate to the inner décor of the building; to its landscape and interior finishing which soften and beautify what otherwise would be a stark, cold, hard mass of steel and concrete.

It is when these two traits of steel and velvet are combined and held in balance, that a picture of the ideal man begins to develop. The firmness and strength of his steel qualities, which might otherwise make him seem harsh, brutal, hard, cold and stern, are softened and tempered. Andelin writes

“Both the steel and velvet are necessary to produce a great character. There has never been a truly great man who was not a possessor of both.”

Steel without the Velvet

What do you get when a man is made up of only some steel qualities, but lacks the velvet characteristics of kindness, compassion, mercy, empathy, gentleness, etc? You get murderous dictators. Brutal leaders such as Napoleon, Stalin, Lenin, Mussolini, Hitler; Idi Amin, and Saddam Hussein, immediately come to mind. These men won renown as strong, stern, unyielding leaders and rulers, but they are not known as great men. Rather than being famous for their traits of steel, they are infamous for their cruel, sadistic and barbaric treatment of others. These men achieved their positions of authority and worldwide notoriety through steely qualities that inspired the confidence and trust of others. They were forceful leaders and were able to win the support of their people. However, other steely characteristics such as uprightness, moral rectitude, and honorable

leadership were notably missing, as were the qualities that make up the velvet spectrum of ideal manhood. Still, they won pre-eminence due to the few steel qualities they did possess. As Andelin puts it, “Instead of being numbered among the great, they are classified as enemies of mankind.”

A man who is made of too much steel and not enough velvet will behave on a lower moral plane. He will tend to be coarse and vulgar; insensitive and overly logical; unempathetic and lacking in kindness; as well as being cruel, critical and cold. He is disrespectful to women, overly harsh toward children and impatient with the elderly. He will tend to view everyone either as a potential opponent, a thief, or a stepping stone toward greater status, power and wealth. So he is a taker; he believes in taking things by force and power; he believes that the strong are meant to rule over the weak; and the weak are meant to serve the strong. He knows how to fight but not how to love.

Velvet without the Steel

On the other hand, a man who is lopsided in the velvet category may lack the steely attributes of courage, self-sacrifice, responsibility, self-discipline, resoluteness, moral action and initiative, among others, when it comes to family, social, civil, and spiritual responsibilities. Several decades ago, poet Robert Bly wrote a book entitled, Iron John: A book about men, in which he, among others, described the emergence in the 60’s and 70’s of what he called the “soft male”: who he described as the kind of man who is so enamored with peace that he can’t even lift let alone wield a sword. A man who has only a few velvety qualities but lacks any steel characteristics is passive; when he should act, he hesitates. He shirks his responsibilities, and would rather be told what to do than to be driven to act by his convictions.

I live in the state of California, famous in part because of one of it’s governors, movie star turned California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. While governing California, there was a time when, frustrated by men who he perceived as preferring to playing it safe; men who opposed him and hesitated when the times called for action, insulted them by referring to them as “Girlie Men”. A girly man, in the governor’s eyes, was someone he felt was cowardly, pessimistic, and hypocritical. According to Tom Heuerman, Ph.D, in an October 2004 article entitled, GIRLIE-MEN, HE-MEN, & REAL MEN, Schwarzenegger, affectionately called “the Governator” by his constituents, used the term “Girlie Men” to mean

“...nuanced (no true colors; no firm convictions), sensitive, indecisive, and touchy-feely flip-flopping wind-surfers who cannot be trusted to stand up to evil-doers wherever they reside—in the family, the organization, and the world.”

“Girlie Men” is an apt synonym for a man who lacks any steel qualities. Heuerman succinctly describes the soft, velvety “Girlie Man” as having a

“...naïve and false innocence about life. Girlie Men do not see evil in others and do not see real dangers around them. Girlie Men do not want to acknowledge power or aggression much less use their own innate power and aggression. They close their eyes to reality. If they do not see danger, they do not have to stand up to injustice.

When faced with tough issues they cower into their innocence and make weakness, helplessness, and powerlessness virtues and appease those who use their creativity to destroy goodness. Girlie Men lack the fierceness to stand against evil, insanity, and immaturity. They need to find their outrage.”

Men without Chests

Terrence Moore comes up with another name for men who lack steel: “wimps.” He wrote

“At the other extreme from true manliness is the wimp...wimps suffer from a want of manly spirit altogether.”

The ancient Greeks, when describing the steel qualities in a man, used the word *thumos* or thymos. Thumos basically carries the meaning of passion or spirit, or internal urge. In both animals and manhood, thumos is what makes them both bristle in the face of a threatening danger, and urges them to fight; defend their property and family; country; principles and faith. Thumos is what makes a manly man – manly. It is those steel qualities we studied a couple of pages ago. But a man who lacks these qualities; who lacks thumos, is considered wimpy and unmanly. According to Moore wimps

“...lack what the ancient Greeks called thumos, the part of the soul that contains the assertive passions: pugnacity, enterprise, ambition, anger. Thumos compels a man to defend proximate goods: himself, his honor, his lady, his country; as well as universal goods: truth, beauty, goodness, justice. Without thumotic men to combat the cruel, the malevolent, and the unjust, goodness and honor hardly have a chance in our precarious world.”

Moore goes on to explain the two conditions that must be present for thumos to fulfill its purpose:

“First, the soul must be properly ordered. Besides thumos, symbolized by the chest, the soul is composed of reason and appetites, symbolized by the head on the one hand and the stomach and loins on the other. Reason has the capacity to discern right from wrong, but it lacks the strength to act. Appetites, while necessary to keep the body healthy, pull the individual toward pleasures of a lower order. In the well-ordered soul, as C.S. Lewis put it, “the head rules the belly through the chest.”

The second condition that must be present is a sufficient level of thumos to enable the man to rise to the defense of honor or goodness when required. Modern education and culture, however, have conspired to turn modern males into what C. S. Lewis called "men without chests," that is, wimps. The chest of the wimp has atrophied from want of early training. The wimp is therefore unable to live up to his duties as a man:

We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.

True, velvet men are not the kind of men, like steely men, who went down in history as notorious or infamous. They are not remembered for evil, but neither are they remembered for good either. As Andelin put it, "they did not build a better world, nor were they adequate as family leaders." Velvet men "do not stand out for anything..." This is true about men in every age, including our own. Goodier wrote in Steel and Velvet

"Most men nowadays have too much velvet, and not enough steel; that is, they are too soft without the hardness. They become wimps, who go through life governed by fear – fear of women, fear of their boss, fear of hard work, fear of growth and change."

Velvet men lack courage and moral rectitude. They refuse to draw a line in the sand. They do not recognize evil for what it is, and therefore do not fight it. They have no martial spirit, and therefore, do not fight to right wrongs and stem the tide of evil. Because they are not willing to die for what is right, they do not truly live as a man was designed to live.

Men of Velvet and Steel

Jesus Christ

In recent years a new awakening of Jesus Christ as a manly man has become the subject of manly conversation, thanks to such books as *Wild at heart* by John Eldredge, and *Why men hate Going to Church* by David Murrow. For far too long Jesus has been characterized as thin, weakly and effeminate, and exemplifying only the velvet qualities. Yet Jesus is the quintessential ideal man; a perfect blend of velvet and steel; the only man who was flawlessly so. By virtue of His profession as a carpenter, the fact that he basically walked everywhere, and at times was physically imposing, he most likely had a sinewy, muscular build and calloused hands. Yes He was compassionate, kind, good, patient, sympathetic and gracious. But what has been lacking in the way we picture Jesus was His manly strength; gravity of spirit; fierceness and resoluteness. He was a perfect balance of steel and velvet. He fulfilled His mission and maintained His commitment to see it through to completion no matter what it cost Him personally.

Jesus was a strong leader. He was a man of conviction and passion, and He saw it as His duty to impose His convictions on others in such a way that they

not only accepted them as their own, but were willing to lay down their lives to advance His cause. It takes moral courage to call men, women and children to that which was and still is ideal morality and spirituality, and thus flies in the face of a lesser breed of men who accept the moral status quo of their given generation.

If ever there was a man who understood that an authentic man is made for others, it was Jesus, who gave His life in serving and saving others. If ever there was a man who saw it as His sacred duty to inspire men to reach higher, it was Jesus. Jesus showed His steely, masculine side, exhibiting moral courage and fearlessness in the face of hostility; being decisive at times he was a forceful and physically imposing figure. Jesus drew a line in the sand, and was not afraid to act when others crossed it, as was exhibited in his aggressive cleansing of the temple. It is awe inspiring, when you think about the fact that among all those thieves and low born men who turned the temple of God into a market place, not one raised a hand to resist Jesus in His outrage and proprietary violent actions. That whip He made was no prop; it was meant to be wielded like a weapon! He made it for a purpose, and used it in fulfilling it. He broke tables and cages and tipped over furniture and spilled money all over the place as He punctuated His rebuke with force. He left only two possible outcomes for those He assailed; stay put and get a whoopin' or duck and run! In the Gospel of Mark we are told that after wrecking everything, he stood his ground keeping people from even walking across the temple court.⁴ And no one dared do so. Would you? It was these steely qualities that led Eldredge to say that Jesus was more like William Wallace than Mother Teresa.

Yet with all His strength, resilience, and ferocity, Christ had a gentle and compassionate side to Him as well, which perfectly balanced His more stern and tough qualities. Women and children were drawn to Him and received tender words and loving touches. In fact, people brought their little children to Jesus just to have Him touch them and bless them.⁵ In fact, in the story of Jesus cleansing the temple with a whip, we are told that as the dust settled, amidst all the broken and tipped over tables and bird cages and animal pens, and spilled and scattered money on the floor that "The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them."⁶ Prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners flocked to hear His strict, no nonsense teaching, and He received them and accepted them.⁷

Jesus faced hypocritical religious leaders and court officials, both Jewish and Roman, with heroic bearing and grave⁸ dignity. He had set his jaw; never

⁴ Mark 11:16

⁵ Mark 10:13

⁶ Matthew 21:14, New International Version

⁷ Matthew 9:10-13; 21:32; Luke 15:1-2

⁸ I chose to use "grave" even though it isn't used much anymore because it is so descriptive of the qualities of steel. To be grave means to be dignified and somber in one's mannerisms and character; to decisively act according to one's word, commitment or promise. Like a piece of steel, a grave man has integrity engraved into his nature.

blinked; never flinched in the face of adversity. Just a few hours before he was subject to numerous sham trials, while praying in the garden of Gethsemane, a huge crowd of motley thugs, temple guards and Roman soldiers “armed with swords and clubs”⁹ came to arrest Jesus, asking where they could find Him. When Jesus simply answered, “I am he.” And the next verse tells us that “When Jesus said, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground.”¹⁰ Unbelievable! There is no record of any other unarmed man in history who by his presence and reputation alone, knocked down such a huge crowd of armed thugs and soldiers.

No mere man ever filled the role of the ideal man with such precision and sublime perfection. No one ever struck such an ideal balance between of steel and velvet; no one but the Son of God, Jesus Christ; in Him, both steel and velvet qualities, “kissed each other.”¹¹ There’s never been a man who could come close to Jesus, but then again, that is what makes Him a perfect example of the ideal man, and one we can all aspire to reach for and be like, which, even if we can never attain to it, will make us better, more manly men; men of steel and velvet.

Abraham Lincoln

It was the American poet, historian and novelist Carl Sandburg who first coined the term “steel and velvet” when writing about Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln was described by Sandburg as possessing both the qualities of steel and of velvet. Sandburg wrote that at times of necessity, Lincoln exhibited such strong leadership that he seemed to border on being almost dictatorial in his use of his presidential authority.

“...he commanded the most powerful armies till then assembled in modern warfare; he enforced conscription of soldiers for the first time in American history; under imperative necessity he abolished the right of habeas corpus; he directed politically and spiritually the wild, massive, turbulent forces let loose in civil war...”

As steely as Lincoln could be, he was also known as a kind, reverent and gentle man. He refused to say anything if he had nothing worthwhile to say. He internalized the troubles of his country to the point where he could not sleep. People observed him on a number of occasions weeping, without ever losing his presidential dignity. In fact, he dignified those attributes that others would be tempted to criticize as signs of weakness in lesser men. In the midst of the bloody civil war he once said to a friend: “...don’t it seem strange to you that I, who could never so much as cut off the head of a chicken, should be selected into the midst of all this blood?”

General Robert E. Lee

⁹ Matthew 26:47

¹⁰ John 18:6

¹¹ Psalm 85:10

When Brad Miner thinks of a complete gentleman, one of the men he thinks about is General Robert E. Lee. Chesterton called Lee “the last of the heroes” and a hero he was. Lee could be called the South’s version of the ideal man. He exemplified what has been called “the three graces of gentility”: sociability, learning and piety.”¹² He was known to unflinchingly use his powers to lead and command in the face of war to such an extent that his often times inadequately armed, clothed and fed men would become as emboldened as David was against Goliath. Yet he did not love power, writing that

“the manner in which an individual enjoys certain advantages over others is a test of a true gentlemen.”¹³

Lee’s velvet quality can be seen in what he said about needlessly calling another’s attention of an offensive act.

“The gentlemen does not needlessly and unnecessarily remind an offender of a wrong he may have committed against him. He cannot only forgive, he can forget; and he strives for that nobleness of self and mildness of character which impart sufficient strength to let the past be but the past. A true man of honor feels humbled himself when he cannot help humbling others.”¹⁴

Sir William Marshall

I know I have already quoted William Marshall in other chapters of this book, but he has to be included in this section because of his reputation for being a man of velvet and steel. William Marshal (1146-1219) has been said to have been the premier knight of his time, Christendom's foremost warrior. He was a man of such gravity that his word was considered as good as another man's coined gold. He has been described as the "greatest knight that ever lived" by then Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton. He served five kings — Henry the Young King, Henry II, Richard the Lionheart, John and Henry III and rose to become one of the most powerful men in Europe.

It is believed by some that the legendary Lancelot of King Arthur’s Round Table was patterned after William Marshall. As a knight Errant Sir William earned a reputation for possessing such virtues as generosity, courage and honesty. He was known for great bravery, and was to jousting what Michale Jordan was to basketball and Tiger Woods was to golf. In his day, jousting tournaments were extremely dangerous and often times fatal - staged battles, or melees, which consisted of groups of combatants who met on a field of battle and hacked away at one another. They were often times brutal, and one or more of the warriors were often killed. These were definitely not the tame, jousting contests that often come to mind today. , and money and valuable prizes could be Marshall actually earned a living in these tournaments by capturing and

¹² as quoted by Miner: The Compleat Gentlemen, p. 89

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

ransoming his defeated opponents (those who lived). His record of wins is the stuff of legends: out of 500 tournaments, William Marshall never lost once! How ya doin'?

William Marshal surpassed all the knights of his time in martial spirit and skill, honor, and loyalty. But, as Robert Lewis points out in his book, *Raising A Modern Day Knight*, he was also a caring father and tender husband, which required the qualities of velvet to also characterize the kind of man he exemplified. Thus history describes him not only as an exceptional man, but as an ideal man, "the flower of chivalry" the knights of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

Lancelot

I have to mention Lancelot, because of my great love for Arthurian legend, and due to the bum rap Lancelot has been given through the many bogus interpretations of the story. Sir Lancelot was a fictional character in the legend of King Arthur. Although many a movie and play has depicted Lancelot as an adulterer and betrayer of his king's trust, he and Guinevere never had an illicit affair. Their love for one another was never acted on. It was an unrequited love that was hidden and restrained from wither, and no inappropriate demonstration of affection was ever demonstrated between them.

Lancelot was a man of steel if ever there was one. He was the best of all the men in King Arthur's kingdom. No one could match him in strength, agility, or prowess. No one ever beat him in tournament, with Lancelot easily overcoming even the strongest opponents. What actually caused Queen Guinevere to fall in love with him, though, was his velvet qualities. When he defeated a fellow knight in battle, Lancelot kneeled and bent himself tenderly over the dying knight as he fervently prayed for the suffering man to be permitted to live. And he was seen weeping even as he did so. It was Lancelot's velvet balance to his steeliness that won the heart and loyalty of his countrymen and his queen.

Sprezzatura

In *The COMPLETE [sic] GENTLEMEN*, Brad Miner uses a very interesting word for the ideal man: *sprezzatura*. The term was first used by an Italian Count by the name of Baldesare in 1478. It represented the balance point between extremes, called the "golden mean." For instance, when applied to courage, it was the mean between being rash and cowardly; and when applied to liberality, it was the mean between extravagance and frugality. On one hand, *sprezzatura* means discretion or being cautious and careful; on the other hand it points to restraint, and even concealment.

Our society as a whole is rather double-minded in the way we feel about a truly discreet or restrained person. We both admire and appreciate such a person at a distance, but we also tend to distrust or suspect anyone who comes across as "closed" or not open. Ours is a voyeuristic culture; crass, vulgar, and uncouth. We are inundated and saturated with internet porn and reality TV. Tastelessness has

replaced that which is tasteful. The straight has become crooked. The notion of being upright is now laughable; the fodder of cynics and comedians. It is hard for a man to take a steely stand against such a strong current of hedonism, immorality and irreverence. As G.K. Chesterton once said,

“It is always simple to fall; there are an infinity of angles at which one falls, and only one in which one stands.”

Tolerance has become a euphemism for intolerance. Restrained and private people are coerced to be tolerant of more “open” lifestyles and belief systems while those belong to the “open club” justify their intolerance of those who strongly disagree with their views and behavior. In such a cynical culture, the restraint of the man who practices the art of sprezzatura will be misunderstood, distrusted, and even labeled a hypocrite. But his actions and carefully chosen words will speak for him. In fact, sprezzatura has more to do with a man’s outward conduct than his inward character. One may deduce what his character is like by his actions, but the term itself points to what he does and says, not what he is or feels. The ideal man’s outward actions and behavior is his sprezzatura. Such a man is discreet and restrained. He is a man who has the discipline to think before he acts, and then acting sensibly and prudently.

The ideal man’s sprezzatura is marked by what might be labeled by others as “a believer in lost causes and forsaken beliefs.” And to some extent it is true. If believing in the necessity of holding on to what can be considered permanent or absolute (the virtues; moral underpinnings; the sacred scriptures; the qualities of steel and velvet, etc), means to be a believer in lost causes, then so be it. He agrees with Chesterton, that “right is right, even if nobody does it” and “Wrong is wrong, even if everybody is wrong about it.” Spinoza once wisely said that all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.

Among Miner’s favorite examples are Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne. Superman is the strongest hero ever produced in America. He is the “Man of Steel.” He is described as “faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound.” He is also the most restrained. Clark Kent’s art of sprezzatura conceals more than any other man, because the depth of one’s sprezzatura is defined by the extent of one’s power and ability (intellectual, physical, and martial prowess). Clark Kent’s grace, humility, discretion and self-restraint concealed his superhuman abilities among his peers. He kept his steel sheathed.

Bruce Wayne too, was a practitioner of sprezzatura. He was a superb martial artist but never practiced his abilities unless his true identity was hidden under the guise of a gentle and introverted man; the wealthy Bruce Wayne. Even when Kent and Wayne meet their Lois Lanes as and Vickie Vales, they never use their celebrity status as super heroes to win them over. An authentic man practices sprezzatura, not because he has finally become what he has aspired to be, but precisely because he hasn’t. He practices being what he isn’t so that in time, he becomes at least something ore than what he was, and something closer to what he desires to be. Once again, our “open” culture would judge such a man

as dishonest; a hypocrite, for acting as if he was something he was not. The “cult of spontaneous sincerity” as Miner calls our secularized and modernized culture, believes rather, that it is far more honest to act crassly and discourteously until one has truly, genuinely and completely become the ideal one aspires to. Such a notion is both ridiculous and naive, and fraught with frustration and futility. The Good Book encourages the latter: to practice being what you aspire to become in the hope that one day you will attain more of it than you would have if you had done nothing. See if you don’t agree with me that the concept of sprezzatura line up perfectly with these words from the Apostle Paul. In speaking about his desire to become a man who is Christ-like, and his zeal to behave himself each day in such a way that he reflects Christ’s nature in his own life, Paul says,

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.”
Philippians 3:12-13

The Martial Spirit of the Ideal Man

For a man to aspire to the shaking off of this culture’s emasculating influence, he must begin to envision himself as a knight or warrior; in a word, possessing the martial spirit. Such men understand that although they are in the world they are not of the world. They are therefore watchful; they see themselves as salt and light, seasoning and influencing the world for God’s good.

A man who possesses a martial spirit knows there exists in this world things worth fighting for and he is both willing and able to fight. He does not love battle. He is not eager to fight. He is prepared to fight. Those who would be latter day knights must understand from a spiritual and physical point of view that they are warriors and that they must be, and I stress this as an explanation and definition of what it means to be martial: ready, willing and able to sacrifice their lives in defense of honor, peace, virtue, faith, the church, and the weak.

I also believe that many men lack the martial spirit today as a direct result of a gradual emasculation and pacification of the chivalric gentleman over the last seven centuries or so. As men become less martial and see themselves less and less as warriors, to the same degree, they become more and more concerned with their outward appearance and become vain. In other words, Peter Pan men who “play the fool.” They cease to command respect from others because they lack honor and courage, and sadly, prowess.

To be martial means to be ready, willing and able to sacrifice life and limb in defense of that which is honorable, virtuous, and righteous. To be without a martial spirit means to assert that there is nothing worth fighting and dying for; that peace is always preferable to war and life is always preferable to death. At this point the true man will find himself in dissent, because to him there are things worth fighting for and laying down his life for. Those firemen and policemen who lost their lives when they chose to run up the world trade center buildings rather than run away, believed there were things worth fighting for, and

laid their lives proving their point. And this is precisely why some men deny that there is anything worth fighting for: because if there are things worth fighting for, then there will always be conflict, or the potential for conflict. He who possesses a martial spirit sees himself living either in a post-war or pre-war era, and should then, based on this understanding, be prepared to fight for what is right and true.

I strongly believe in the need of inculcating once again the martial spirit and martial prowess in the very definition of what it means to be an authentic man. The very essence of true manhood is aspire to die with courage fighting valiantly for the right, rather than die spinelessly pretending there is no right. Yet the one pervasive character among many men within our western culture today, is a collective consciousness that seems to be led by the conviction that accommodation is always better than conflict. I must disagree. I am not so naive as to think for a moment that the natural state of humanity is peaceful coexistence, and that such a peace can be maintained by conciliation, with no need for the prowess and the capability that the martial spirit and martial arts distill into a man's soul. Such a man is a vigilant man, trained to be prepared and ready if and when the inevitable conflict happens. There were two quotes spoken by King Arthur (Sean Connery) in the movie *FIRST KNIGHT* that capture the essence of the martial spirit. One was the opening prayer he prayed to open a meeting of his Round Table: *"May God grant us the wisdom to discover right, the will to choose it, and the strength to make it endure."* The other was a statement he made to check the threatening gestures of his arch-enemy Malagant: *"There's a peace only to be found on the other side of war. If that war should come I will fight it!"*

AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER SIDNEY HOOK once said something rather remarkable:

"It is better to be a live jackal than a dead lion - for jackals, not for men. Men who have the moral courage to fight intelligently for freedom have the best prospects of avoiding the fate of both live jackals and dead lions. Survival is not the end all and be all of a life of a worthy man. Sometimes the worst thing we can know about a man is that he survived. Those who say life is worth living at any cost have already written themselves an epitaph of infamy, for there is no cause and no person they will not betray to stay alive."

Young people today tend to lack a sense of calling or mission. This is partly what Michael Barone is getting at in his recent book *Hard America, Soft America*. We live in a nation that has achieved an unprecedented level of luxury and in an age in which technology encourages passivity. Young people ought to be encouraged to be physically fit, morally responsible and intellectually active. The antidote to the moral and civil lethargy is prowess, faith and moral restraint, as well as scholarship, devotion and self-control. Brad Miner was once asked this question:

“How can men exhibit the manly virtues, but at the same time exhibit the appropriate sensitivities?” [in other words, how can a man learn to be steel and velvet?]

Miner answered:

“...We do well to reconsider the ancient qualities of the knight, which are loyalty, generosity, courtesy, honor, courage and restraint. It’s fair to say that men in the Middle Ages mostly fell short of the ideal, as probably we will today. But for heaven’s sake, let’s at least aspire to a higher standard.

If I could give one rather reckless bit of advice to American men, it’s this: Learn restraint, learn to fight, remember that you will die, and meditate devoutly on the fact that death is preferable to dishonor.”

The IDEAL Man

Before I conclude this chapter, let me condense the steel and velvet metaphors for virtuous, chivalric masculinity into an acrostic, using the word IDEAL, as in The Ideal man. The IDEAL man -

Initiates (rejects passivity; reacts; is proactive; doesn’t hesitate when right action is called for; is self-motivating)

Disciplines (has learned to master himself; restrain his passions; bring himself under control; victory over himself is his main focus, even when defeated by an opponent)

Empathizes (learns how to cheer, challenge, care for and encourage)

Achieves (never quits – Proverbs 24:16; understands that he that shoots for the moon, stands a better chance of hitting the tops of the trees; sets high goals –reaches high, goes farther, digs deeper)

Loyal – (keeps his commitments and covenants; is faithful to his biblically inspired code; is dutiful and faithful; is known for his integrity, keeps his word and thus has a good name; is true to his clan/tribe/team/family etc)

The Sword and the Sheath

The blending of these two necessary ingredients to the recipe goes into the making of the ideal man. There are not opposites, but are meant to compliment each other as they are united together in the heart of a man. It is only when these two elements are held up and practiced does a boy truly become a truly great, mature and chivalrous man. To be deficient in either quality will result in awkwardness in the way he carries himself, behaves himself and treats others.

As a Christian and a Pastor, I believe that evil is personified in three forms: what the bible classically describes as the flesh (within the personhood of man) the world (within the social sphere of humanity) and the devil (what originates in

and manifests through the person of the devil). All that to say this: I do not believe there is any negotiable middle ground between good and evil. No true man can accept such a premise. The true man personified iconographically in the chivalrous knight, prepares daily, and develops to the best of his ability - prowess so as to be prepared, ready, and capable of enjoining the war against good and evil when it presents itself. And any study of the true, chivalrous knight's martial spirit and prowess will also reveal that training in strength, weapons and hand to hand combat was matched by training in ethics, virtue and character development, so that such a man would be able to live in peace while remaining prepared in an instant to respond appropriately and if need be, lethally, toward anything that threatens the peace; the good and the right.

A man's character is like a sword of steel, and his practice of sprezzatura like a velvet lined sheath. If he shows too much steel, he will be like a warrior who always has his sword out of the sheath, and he will scare people away. If a man is too soft, he will be like a sword that is always sheathed in velvet and of no use to anyone. The great Samurai warrior Yamamoto Tsunetomo once wrote

“If a person has his sword out all the time, he is habitually swinging a naked blade; people will not approach him and he will have no allies.

If a sword is always sheathed, it will become rusty, the blade will dull, and people will think as much of its owner.

There are two kinds of dispositions, inward and outward, and a person who is lacking in one or the other is worthless...”¹⁵

What kind of manly disposition characterizes you? Is your blade side showing too much? Is it not showing enough? What does your outer disposition tell people about the man you really are? For a man to show his worth, he must seek to be seen as a man of both steel and velvet. He must sharpen the steel part of him so that he is able to guide his son into the hardness and toughness that characterizes one half of the ideal man. He must also show his son the importance of keeping his hard and sharp side “sheathed” in velvet, so that others feel safe and cared for by him. Learning to be both and develop both will bring him ever nearer to becoming an example, although imperfect, of the ideal man every man and boy ought to aspire to be. Remember, if you aim at the moon, you will at least hit the top of the trees.

Part one of ManMakers covered the significant role Fathers and Mentors play in passing on a legacy guiding of manhood. Like an archer, fathers are to aim and shoot their sons into the future with their target being chivalrous, virtuous manhood. It is the one thing – the singular purpose a man is put on this earth to successfully accomplish. If you are a father, or will be a father soon, or are a

¹⁵ Hagakure means In the Shadow of Leaves and was written as a practical and spiritual guide for a warrior, drawn from a collection of commentaries by the samurai Yamamoto Tsunetomo

mentor, I hope you understood the seriousness of the calling on your life to help young boys see the light of true manhood, and to guide them in their journey to becoming authentic men of honor and virtue.

Part two emphasized some important philosophical principles or standards that support and undergird the man-making process. In order to counter the emasculating influences our culture seeks to exercise over young men today, a recovery of gender specific masculinity is necessary along with the inculcation of a code of conduct aimed at softening the more steely characteristics of young boys, while encouraging them to accept, honor and control their hard wired masculine natures. Part two concluded with a balanced vision of the ideal man, toward which every man and boy can aspire to be like.

Part three will show you how to customize and implement a man-making curriculum and directional process that will help you make a man out of your sons and protégé's. Practical tools and charts are included in the Appendices to guide you in carefully crafting a life path and building a Man-making community and culture, so others may be able to benefit from what you begin. Get ready to pick up that hammer! It's time for you to go to work.