

## CHILDREN OF GOD, WE TOO!

In services without communion we hear in the absolution the sentence, “To those who believe in His name He has given the right to become the children of God.” It comes from that incredibly profound prologue to the Gospel according to John. Jesus is the only Son of the Father, and yet we have the right to be called children of God also.

Many of the theologians of the early church no longer knew Hebrew, and the connection between the “LORD” of the Old Testament and Jesus Christ as that LORD was not always clearly recognised. However, the Arians went further, and assigned the Son a place among the creatures of God, although they said that He was the first of God’s creatures, through whom He made the rest of creation. The Orthodox had difficulty in finding a formulation for the creed that was made up entirely of phrases from Scripture. Actually, that should not have been so difficult. John 1: 1-3 would have been enough! He was with the Father from the beginning, was with the Father, that is, distinct from Him, and was also God, that is, the same in nature as the Father. Whatever can be said of the Father can be said of Him as well, except that He is Son, and that Father is Father, and so have they always been!

Let no one think that the tiny baby in the manger at Bethlehem was the beginning of existence for Him. He was God almighty from all ages past, who now, to save His creation, becomes part of His creation itself, hidden in weakness.

But when the Orthodox suggested scriptural phrases like “Son of God”, the Arians nodded at each other, and said, “We, too, are sons of God.” When the Orthodox said, “He is of the Father”, meaning derived from the Father, the Arians nodded at each other and said, “We, too, are of Him.” What they were doing was blasphemous, because they were dragging Him down to their level, insisting on speaking about His eternal nature in His relationship with the Father in terms of a creature. They were arguing from themselves as creatures to the Son as a creature.

However, rightly understood, we are allowed to say, “We, too.” When we do so, we must be careful to observe the great distinction between Him in His divinity and us in our creatureliness. However, because of the creaturely nature like ours that He adopted, we can argue from what He is as our Redeemer to what we are and shall be. We argue from His divinity and His humanity together to the high privileges that He accords to “those who have received Him” “to those who believe in His name” (John 1: 12). When Jesus was baptised, the Father acknowledged Him as His Son. Through Him we have the tremendous honour of being able to say that we are children of God. For, as Paul wrote, we “are all the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of us who have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:26-27).

When we begin to press the expression “children of God” we have to be careful not to become blasphemous. Peter at one place says that believers are “partakers of the divine nature.” This does not mean, as the Eastern churches claim, that we shall be made divine (They call it “theosis”). God’s essence is incommunicable. However, in His grace, He will give us some of His own qualities, including eternal life, and imperishability. In nature, it is true, the child of any animal or plant has the same nature as its parent. Certainly, the Scriptures say that believers have been given the right to be called “the children of God.” We reject as blasphemous the ideas that the Mormons have, that in the life to come each true believer will be a god ruling over his own universe, with his wife eternally pregnant, to populate his own universe! However, it is in connection with the affirmation that we are now the children of God that St John says that it has not yet appeared what we shall be. We know two things, that we shall be like Jesus in His glory, and that we shall see Him as He is. Paul expresses another aspect of it when he writes, “And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.” There is no higher or more precious thing that believers can say about themselves than that they are children of God. Very clearly, we as yet have no inkling of what that involves.

Hebrews chapter two refers to Psalm 8:4-6, which says that the son of man was made a little lower than the angels, but that God has crowned Him with glory and honour, and has put everything under His feet.” Here is another point of contact. Jesus preferred to refer to Himself as “the Son of Man.” The title partly hid His true divinity, and was partly also a messianic title. However, now that the Son of Man has been restored to His place at the right hand of the Father, crowned with glory and honour, after He has tasted death for everyone, He “brings many sons to glory.” He calls those who believe in Him His “brothers.” In Him man is with God on the throne, and the Father will also make us “sit with Him in heavenly places” (Eph 2:6). In fact, Paul writes as though He has, in a sense, already done so.

When we hear the Father saying that He is well pleased in His Son, we can turn to the doctrine of

justification through faith for Christ's sake, and affirm that God, who imputes to us the obedience or righteousness of His Son, is well pleased with us. That is so because God has done the incredible thing of counting His spotless Son as the sinner, and reckoning us as the righteousness of God in Him. He is well pleased with us.

When we read about the Spirit descending on Jesus and remaining on Him, we can say, "We, too." For Christian baptism is indeed the conferral of the Holy Spirit. Peter said, "Be baptised, everyone of you, for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Paul wrote, "For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor 12:13). In Acts the gift of the Spirit regularly come in baptism, and even the exceptions, at Pentecost, at Samaria, and in the house of Cornelius show the close connection between the gift of the Spirit Himself and baptism.

There is still another "we too", connected with the name "Christ", which means "the Anointed One." When Jesus was baptised, the Spirit anointed him for His work of ministry as the Messiah. In one of the "seal of the Spirit" passages of the New Testament, which refer to baptism, 2 C 1:21-22, Paul uses three parallel expressions connected with baptism. The Father has anointed us, has sealed us, and has put the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit. The first expression is the word that gives us the title "Christ." The Father has "christed" us! What a reason for praise!

We can expand the concept "we, too" if we take up Paul's concept of being united with Christ. Jesus suffered, was crucified, died, was buried, was raised, was seated with the Father, and will reign with Him for ever. By baptism we have died with Christ, been buried with Him, and have been raised with Him. Because of this, we suffer with Him, and are crucified with Him. Indeed, because of what He has done, we shall be seated with Him in the heavenly realms, and reign with Him. Paul expresses this in another way when he writes that it has been the Father's eternal purpose that we believers shall be "conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He may be the firstborn among many brothers." As Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the express likeness of His person, through Him the image of God that was lost in Eden will be restored. Since our baptism we are being renewed in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, according to the image of God as He first created man. Through Him, we, too!