

Year of Faith:

We are Children of God

■ Fr Wojciech Nowacki



The concept of a man being a child of God expresses a special and close relationship between him and God.

It relates to our faith in God as man's Creator and His care for Man and the world. The Divine Infancy of man and God's fatherhood point to the origin of everything, particularly of man's origin in God. This reminds us about our complete dependency on Him.

The Old Testament rarely refers to the sonship of man in relation to God, and almost never in the context of Creation. Only in the Book of Malachi, we find 1:6 and 2:1: "If I am indeed father, where is the honour due to me?... says the Lord Sabaoth... and is there not one Father of us all? Did not one God create us? Beyond creation, God showed His love and His fatherly care of the nation of Israel when He liberated them from slavery in Egypt, established the Covenant of Sinai, and protected them during the journey through the desert until their entrance into the Promised Land. In this context, Israel is called the firstborn son of God" (Ex 4:22, Deut 14:1, Is 1:2), whereas the Israelites called God the Father of the chosen nation (see Deut 32:5, Jer 3:4, Is 63:16). The Divine Infancy refers here to a community, not to individuals.

During the time of King David, we can detect biblical references to the Divine Infancy regarding individuals of high importance in the nation. One such person is David (see Ps 89:27). God appears to him as Father (2 Sm 7:14, 1 Chr 22:10). Also, in these unusual cases, God's chosen ones—those called to a special mission— were qualified for Divine Infancy.

Christ—The Only-begotten Son of God the Father

Jesus frequently expresses his particular relationship with God the Father as an exclusive Divine

Fatherhood and Sonship. Based on this special and sole relationship, Jesus has the authority to insist that his disciples accept his teaching and the fact that God is his Father in a particular way. It is important to note that Jesus calls God—'Abba'—'Daddy' (Mk 14:36, Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6).

According to the synoptic Gospels, whenever Jesus speaks to God, he calls him 'Father'. A good



example of this is the 'Hymn of Joy' (Mt 11:25–27, Lu 10:21–22).

Jesus calls God not only his Father, but also the Father of the people, or at least, of his disciples. According to the exegetes, the authentic texts of Jesus' expression 'your father' are: Mk 11:25, Mt 6:32, Lk 12:30, Mt 5:48, Lu 6:36, Lk 12:32, and Mt 23:9. God revealed by Jesus is merciful and close to the people. The consequences of His Fatherhood towards all people are expressed in the requirement to love our neighbour (Mt 5:45–48). Jesus taught his disciples to cry out to God as their Father (see Mt 6:9, Lu 11:2). He did not mean it as a new way of calling but as an intimate experience. Jesus leads into the relationship of Sonship that is between him and his Father. Yet, his relationship with the Father is unique and different from that of the disciples. However, it constitutes the basis of their sonship.

The Fatherhood of God and the sonship of all believers are expressed more clearly in the Letters of Saint Paul. The Letter to the Galatians (Ga 4:4–7) indicates the initiative of God the Father who sends forth His Son and then the Holy Spirit. Jesus is born under the law and from the Virgin, fully assuming our humanity. This is the only way he can completely free us so we can receive the 'adopted sonship', which constitutes the main purpose of his incarnation. The term 'adoption' does not belittle our Divine Infancy but emphasises the unconditional love of God, who adopts us as sons although we are only His creatures. Children of God participate in the relationship between Jesus and the Father. Thanks to our unity with Jesus, we can also call God 'Abba',

IN THIS ISSUE

Year of Faith:

We are Children of God

Fr Wojciech Nowacki

Leadership:

Seeking a life of holiness—no to sin!

Cyril John

Questions to the ICCRS
Doctrinal Commission:

Can charisms be manifested in a person who has not been baptised in the Spirit?



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According to the synoptic Gospels, whenever Jesus speaks to God, he calls him 'Father'. A good

because the Spirit of the Son sent forth by the Father moves us. There is a close link between the mission of Jesus and that of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is called ‘the Spirit of the Son’, which underlines the connection between his death, his resurrection, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was sent to enable people receive their adopted sonship. It is the Holy Spirit who calls in us ‘Abba Father’. Saint Paul mentions our adopted sonship by God in other texts, for instance: Rom 8:14–17, Eph 1:5, Eph 1:13, 2 Cor 1:22, and 2 Cor 5:5. According to these passages, the adopted sonship has an eschatological dimension, open to the fulfilment that we do not possess yet. Assimilation to Jesus and the participation in His Sonship towards God should develop and deepen in us until Jesus will be fully formed in us (see Gal 4,19).

John the Apostle speaks about the sonship of God when he says that the one who believes in Jesus ‘is born’ of God, begotten of Him (see Jn 1:12, 1 Jn 2:29; 3:9; 4,7; 5:1). The new birth means being ‘born of the Spirit’ (see Jn 3:6, 6:63). Here, the Holy Spirit is shown as the one who acts directly in us and is the source of our Divine sonship. According to Saint John, He is the gift of Jesus resurrected and glorified, given to his disciples (see Jn 7:39; 14:16, 15:26, 16:7). Saint John emphasises the difference between the original Divine Sonship of Christ and the Divine sonship of believers, which is a participation in the Sonship of Christ. God is not the Father of Jesus and the people in the same way (Jn 20:17), though Jesus calls His disciples ‘brothers.’ The most telling is the passage from the First Letter of John (1 Jn 3:1–3), “You must see what great love the Father has lavished on us by letting us be called God’s children -- which is what we are! My dear friends, we are already God’s children, but what we shall be in the future has not yet been revealed. We are well aware that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is”. This passage stresses the eschatological, awaited fullness of sonship, which we will achieve when we behold God face to face by the grace of the relationship between the Sonship and Divine Likeness. We cannot imagine ourselves having our Divine Infancy without the presence of Jesus in us through the anointing of the Spirit (see 1 Jn 2:20–27; 3:24).

The Divine Infancy as a participation in the life of the Holy Trinity


The Holy Spirit is a bond of love between the Father and the Son. The obedience of the incarnated Son towards God the Father is expressed in the Holy Spirit. A Christian is filled with the same Spirit who led Jesus in His earthly life and with

whom he was filled after the resurrection. Jesus, as the only begotten Son of the Father, is unique. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, He becomes the rule of a new life for all. By receiving the Holy Spirit, we can participate in the Divine Sonship that originally belonged only to Jesus. This is why Jesus, as the only begotten Son of God, is at the same time the ‘firstborn among many brothers.’ As the begotten Son of the Father, He makes us children of God.

Our Divine Infancy leads us into a particular relationship with each of the three persons of the Blessed Trinity. According to the New Testament, we are in communion with Jesus because we have the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Spirit is the closest Divine Person. That is why he unites us with the Son and the Father. Each of the three Divine Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, relates to us in a particular way. The Holy Spirit does not make us similar to Himself but to Jesus. He does this by making us sons in the Son and participants in the Sonship of Jesus.

As participants in the Divine Sonship, we are children of God the Father, but we are neither sons of Jesus, the Son of God, sons of the Holy Spirit, nor sons of the whole Holy Trinity. We are adopted as sons by the One who is the Father in the mystery of life of the Holy Trinity. God gives us Himself as the Father, joining us to His communion with Jesus and loving us as He loves Jesus.

Our adopted sonship depends on the Sonship of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became a man. Jesus makes us participants in His relationship with God and we do not become his sons but rather his brothers (Rom 8:28, Heb 2:17). Saint Athanasius of Alexandria says, “The Son of God became a man so He can make us God.” For the risen Jesus exceeds all the limits of space and time, and the Spirit fulfils everything. All the members of the mystical Body of Christ can participate in the life of the Head. The Son gives us himself in His incarnation, death, resurrection and obedience towards the Father. Also, sending forth the Holy Spirit thanks to whom we can cry out ‘Abba Father’.

Celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism, I rejoice in this mystery of faith. Through simple gestures and words, the Holy Spirit comes upon a baby and changes him radically, making him similar to Jesus to the extent that God the Father recognizes him as His own. The Voice of God sounds: ‘this is my beloved child in whom I am well-pleased.’ In the Holy Spirit, through Jesus, we have access to the Father. We call ourselves ‘children of God,’ ‘which is what we are.’ 

Seeking a life of holiness—no to sin!

■ Cyril John



St. Paul had the courage to challenge those under his spiritual care: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). All those called to spiritual leadership should be able to say with St. Paul: Take me for your model, as I take Christ. Leaders are supposed to be people who inspire and draw others to follow the Master. Primarily, a leader shapes and moulds others into godliness through a life of personal holiness. A leader must lead by example and not just by exhortation. That is why St Paul told Timothy to “set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12). We need to follow the law to give others “an example to imitate” (2 Thes 3:9). Double standards weaken our moral and spiritual strength and make us tepid and ineffective leaders. An African proverb says, “I cannot hear what you are saying, for what you are is thundering in my ear.”

How could a blind man lead another blind man? (Lk 6:29). This could be a reason why there are leaders in the Church, communities and prayer groups who are not effective. Call to leadership is a call to holiness. Wherever the leadership is plagued with lust, greed and lack of forgiveness, the ministry he or she leads tends to lose zeal, power and direction and gets weakened and disillusioned. Francis Bacon rightly concluded, “He that gives good advice builds with one hand. He that gives good counsel and example builds with both. But he that gives good admonition and bad example builds with one hand and pulls down with the other.”

Blessed John Paul II pointed out that “true holiness is the womb of true mission and that all Christians are called to be missionary.” The concept of holiness for all has a solid basis in the Sacred Scripture. In the Old Testament, God said to Moses, “Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Lv 19:2). In the New Testament, Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount, “In a word, you must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). St. Paul insists, “It is God’s will that you grow in holiness...” (1 Thes 4:3). In 1 Tim 3:2, St Paul says that leaders and ministers in the Church must be “above reproach.” A speaker addressed some of the major challenges that will be faced by pastors and church leaders in the coming ten years. The non-Catholic clergyman remarked, “Unless purity of motive, clarity of communication, sanctity in marriage, chastity in sex and fidelity in marriage become our hallmark, many would not have to pack up and close church doors: God will use the world to do that.”

“Then you who teach another, are you failing to teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You who detest idols, do you rob temples? You who boast of the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law? For, as it is written, “Because of you

the name of God is reviled among the Gentiles” (Rm 2:21–24). Sin of every Christian has a social nature, as we are part of the Mystical Body of Christ. When I lose grace and am in the state of sin, it affects the whole body. Some may tend to say, ‘It is my personal problem’. No, it is not the problem of one person alone since each one of us is part of the Body of Christ. Anointing is lost through self-indulgence. To continue to experience the power of God, one must lead a life of self-denial, a life of radical renunciation and prayer. I do not believe that any man or woman could over-indulge in his natural appetites and at the same time enjoy the fullness of God’s power. The gratification of the flesh and the fullness of the Spirit do not go hand in hand.

Musician Charles-François Gounod said, “One drop of holiness is worth more than an ocean of genius.” We find this from the life and mission of St Jean Mary Vianney. Years ago, John Wesley, a cleric of the Church of England and Christian theologian said, “Give me a 100 men who hate nothing but sin, who fear nothing but God, and who know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and I will shake the world.” Therefore, Jesus was quite forceful while saying, “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot” (Mt 5:13). Here, what Jesus tells us is that if we do not live a life of holiness, we will be like salt that has lost its flavour and can no longer do what salt is meant to do. Should that be the case, we would be totally worthless.

After St Paul had the Damascus experience, it led him to a radical renunciation of all those things that he previously considered to be precious. The love of Christ compelled him to say, “I reckon everything as complete loss for the sake of what is so much more valuable, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have thrown everything away; I consider it all as mere refuse, so that I may gain Christ and be completely united with him” (Phil 3:8–9). We need to renounce everything that is unbecoming of a disciple. The principle adopted by St. Paul should be the motto of each one of us: “I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27).

When France faced many serious problems, St Martin, Bishop of Tours said, “O Lord, what would it take to spare my country? What would it take?” The Lord replied, “Martin, it would take one saint.” Holiness is powerful and contagious. I conclude with the words of Cardinal Francis Van Thuan of Vietnam taken from the advice he gave to the seminarians of the University of Salford: “I have had this experience: if I follow Jesus faithfully, step by step, he will bring me to my goal... Don’t worry about how you will attract the crowd; be certain that if you follow Jesus, the people will follow you!” 🏰



QUESTIONS TO THE ICCRS DOCTRINAL COMMISSION

The ICCRS Doctrinal Commission, currently headed by Dr. Mary Healy, is in consultation with theologians and experts from around the world.

If you have a question about the CCR, please send it to newsletter@iccrs.org

Can charisms be manifested in a person who has not been baptised in the Spirit?

Charisms are special graces distributed by the Holy Spirit to enable Christians to be powerful channels of God's love and presence in the world. Whether extraordinary or ordinary, charisms are to be used in service to build up the body of Christ (CCC, 2003). "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). Unlike sanctifying gifts, charisms are given in different measures to different members of the Church. They are gifts to be given away, ways in which God's goodness reaches our neighbor through us.

In recent Church history, before the Second Vatican Council, the charisms were often neglected. Fr Raniero Cantalamessa notes that "the charisms disappeared not so much from the life of the Church but from theology." The Charismatic Renewal has contributed to the rediscovery of the charisms as part of Christian life.

Charisms are especially crucial for evangelization. Jesus himself began his charismatic ministry after he was filled with the Spirit at his baptism. "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness," and overcame the tempter. He then "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (Luke 4:1-14; see Acts 10:38).

Jesus told his apostles that before they began their mission to the ends of the earth, they must wait until they are "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Evangelization is the work of the Holy Spirit, who empowers them and confirms their message with accompanying charisms, signs and wonders (Mark 16:20).

Baptism contains the seed of the charisms

Let us look at what Scripture tells us about receiving charisms. After the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, with the gift of tongues and overflowing praise of God, Peter stood up and explained to the gathered crowd how they too could receive the same Spirit: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). This means that charisms are ultimately rooted in baptism. Paul likewise points to baptism as the source of charisms: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13).

Later in Acts, when a group of newly baptized did not manifest any charisms, the apostles recognized that something more was needed for the full outpouring of the Spirit. So they came and laid their hands on the newly baptized, who then

received the Spirit with a visible manifestation of charisms (Acts 8:17). The Church recognizes this imposition of hands as the origin of the sacrament of confirmation, "which in a certain way perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church" (CCC 1288).

Thus baptism and confirmation are an authentic "baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire." These sacraments confer the Holy Spirit and sanctifying grace in Jesus Christ. When candidates are well prepared through the announcement of the kerygma and sound teaching on the gifts of the Spirit, they often quickly express gifts such as prophecy and speaking in tongues.

In many cases, however, the full effects of sacraments appear only later, when a person receives prayer for baptism in the Holy Spirit. When you put a sugar cube in a bowl of milk, you cannot taste the sweetness until you stir the milk. Prayer for baptism in the Spirit is not a new sacrament but a channel of grace that brings alive what was received in the sacraments. We should not conclude that a baptized person cannot manifest any charisms until they have received prayer for baptism in the Spirit.

By opening oneself to the Holy Spirit with docility, humility and love, the charisms emerge in full measure. Then we find that our works of our service, prayer, evangelization or teaching have new power to touch hearts, enlighten intelligence, lead to conversion, and heal.

Charisms, abilities and false gifts

The charisms of the Holy Spirit are supernatural. They are distinct from natural talents or learned skills. Charisms can, however, be grafted onto an innate gift such as teaching or music and put it to effective use for the kingdom of God.

Paul teaches that discernment is required for the proper exercise of charisms. "Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thes 5:19-22). False gifts are dangerous counterfeits of true charisms, which can be manifested by people subject to the influence of Satan. Jesus warned, "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evil-doers'" (Matt 7:22-23).

We must not forget that we do not own the charisms. They can be lost if we fail to act under the grace of the Holy Spirit, building up the Church in humility and love. 