

Adoption

We all know what the word “adoption” refers to in the ordinary, everyday sense: Children who could not be cared for by birth parents are taken in by others who desire to have a child and, through a legal process, become the “nurturing parents.” This isn’t a dictionary definition, but my own attempt at a description.

Generally speaking, I think the vast majority of people would regard the adoption of children as a beautiful reality and something which is of mutual benefit to those who do the adopting and those who are adopted. I know that in my extended family we have been greatly enriched by the presence of adopted children: Because they are of mixed race, it is obvious that they are not children of “blood” or “genetics,” but it really doesn’t matter: They are, no less, our nieces or cousins or second cousins as the case may be: They are fully family members and not aliens or strangers. [At least this is the way I feel about them and the way I perceive others in the family do.]

Adoption is also a theme of the Gospel of Salvation: It is, in fact, a way of characterizing the status of all who are baptized into Christ Jesus. The logic of this adoption goes something like this: The divine and human natures are ‘married’ in Jesus, and having risen from the dead he has recreated our humanity. He is the “firstborn” of many brothers and sisters.

My spiritual reading informs my reflection as I quote Blessed Columba Marmion, (a nineteenth century Benedictine Abbot) on the matter: *“By nature God has only one Son. By love, He will have a multitude of them, without number. This is the grace of super-natural adoption.”* These words are profound enough, but they are much more so than we might first grasp: Marmion contemplates the “infinite good” who is God . . . who is at an “infinite distance from everything that is imperfection, or everything that is ‘creature,’ of everything that is not God Himself.” Despite this, “God has decreed that we enter into a sharing of

[the] inner life that belongs to him alone . . . [and] participation in this life constitutes our holiness.”

But, as we know from divine revelation, God does not go by the name “infinite perfection” but we have come to know Him as “Father,” and as “Love.” Following from this identity, “God predestines us to be, no longer simply His creatures but His children . . . to be his adopted children, (Ephesians 1:5)” Marmion remarks that we are, “by nature, further from the race of God than animals are” from us! Here the analogy is with human adoption: No one “adopts” a plant or an animal: Properly speaking, we only adopt those belonging to the human race. Therefore, it appears that God is breaking the rules of adoption by adopting outside of His race, (so to speak). The solution to this is the recognition of that mysterious sharing in God’s nature which we call “grace.” *“In adopting us, in giving us grace, God . . . penetrates the depths of our nature. Without changing what is essential in the order of this nature, He elevates it interiorly by this grace, to the point that we are truly children of God.”* *“Grace becomes in us the cause of actions and operations that are super-natural and tend towards a divine end.”* *“We are sons, like Jesus---we by the title of grace, He by nature . . . He saves, we are saved.”*



Therefore, in a rousing conclusion to this thought, Marmion exhorts: *“Let us adapt ourselves to this Divine thought that wishes us to find our holiness in our conformity with Christ. There is no other way. We shall be pleasing to the eternal Father . . . only if He recognizes in us the features of His Son.”*