

Light and Life

On Being A Child of God

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For the last week or so, I have been thinking about what it means to be a "child of God." The teacher in my English 102 class assigned an essay asking us to try to define ourselves with one word. I could only narrow it down to three. Sigh! I think I've always had a problem following directions.

I remember a few years back, when I was talking with some Christian people about religion and spirituality. The conversation was quite lively and friendly as we shared ideas, and then someone asked me what religion I was. Talk about an awkward moment! I didn't know what to say. I hadn't even thought about it. I honestly didn't know. I skirted the issue by saying I was raised Catholic. They accepted that with no further inquiry, but I walked away from that experience flustered. I realized the person was really checking to see if my thoughts were worth considering, and rather than facing my own questions about my faith, I felt I had somehow compromised the reality of who I am and misled these people at the same time. Writing this essay has been a long time in coming, but I guess I can't put it off anymore.

To make it as clear as possible, I am a child of God. This is how I see myself. I chose this term shortly after that day with the Christians and I continue to use it even now when asked what my religion is. You might be surprised at how often that actually comes up. I could probably use the word "Christian" instead, and not be completely wrong. I believe in Jesus and using the common term would certainly produce less of a reaction from people. But somewhere inside I think I want people to react, to ponder what it means when I say that I am a child of God. I'm not out to make their life easier by placing myself inside their boxes, letting them know that I'm part of their club. I feel somewhat limited when I refer to myself as "Christian" or "raised Catholic," while I feel strength in the view that I am a "child of God."

When I think about it, I probably could have used a one-word phrase or two that came close, but they just didn't seem quite right. "Child of God" is

simply more precise. I had thought of "Patriel," which, when translated, means "rock of God," but I've wavered in my faith too many times to sit strongly with that word. Then there is "Annadiel," which means "grace of God." I laugh at the idea of trying to apply that to myself. Graceful is not the first thought that enters my head when I think of myself. The closest I could come up with is Sohnriel, which means "son of God." I pondered that for a bit, but I just couldn't settle into it, mainly because Sohnriel is such a foreign word that it loses its significance to me. There is also a qualitative difference to me between the word "son" and the word "child." "Son" labels me with gender in my relationship to God, whereas the word "child" has a universality to it that draws me to consider this name for me.

Now it's not my intention in this writing to preach religion to a captive reader. To most people, God obviously represents a Creator or a higher power of some sort. And the word "child" designates our relationship to the one who created us. So it's a very straightforward relationship of the created to the Creator. I have chosen to define myself purposefully this way, rather than simply taking on the traditional labels that attend religious believers everywhere. The last thing I want to end up being is tradition bound, because appeals to tradition fall hollow to the truth of the moment for me, much as the generally accepted fallacy of using them in an argument.

We are living in a world where there are so many differences: the color of our skin, the country we live in, whether we are male or female, brown hair or black hair, tall or short, fat or thin, rich or poor, Republican or Democrat, left-handed or right-handed, and so on and so on. But then we devise more intricate ways of separating ourselves from one another. We divide up in our faith over whether we are Catholics or Protestants, Muslim or Hindu, New Age or Christian, or even split a little further to which type of Catholic or which type of Protestant we are. It becomes mind boggling. Wars have occurred and are occurring because someone believes their religion is right and they are somehow justified in killing the "heathen," so to speak. How many people have died in the name of God? How many people get ostracized in the name of God? How many people are left out in the name of God? There comes a point when we look out in the world and it's very hard for us to see any area where we are in common with each other and that is sad.

But there is a common place we can meet each other. If there is a Creator, which I believe there is, then at a very basic level we are all created by this Being. We are its offspring, its children. That means all of us, regardless of status, regardless of religion, regardless of what we have or what we don't and even regardless of what we believe. That is something we all have in common. We are children of God. I choose this term for myself because of the fact that it identifies us all. I don't want to define myself in a way that brings separation. I don't want to be called a "Christian" if

that name means that I am separate from any other group of people. I don't need to have a label to fall back on so that I can feel comfortable in the world, or more directly, so that others around me can feel more comfortable with me.

The bottom line is that most people want to be able to identify who you are by those things you belong to. It breeds comfortableness which isn't all bad, but it also breeds division and a sense of separateness when they become the litmus test for whether we choose to include someone in our lives or not.

I love God and I want to learn to love each person individually for who they are. If I see us as having something in common, then it is a whole lot easier to relate to our differences than when we don't have a common ground. So I am a child of God. It would be hard for me to cope in this life without having this view. I'm not perfect, make plenty of mistakes, and fall short of the ideal so many times I can't keep count. But in my own personal sense of religion, God doesn't check on the mistakes and the differences as much as he checks to see if we're still behind him and trying to catch up. And this, I claim to be.

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