

How Do Children Become Active Subjects within the Domestic Church?

Rereading Schleiermacher's *Weihnachtsfeier* in view of Developing a Roman Catholic Ecclesiology of the Domestic Church.

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The patristic notions of 'little church' and 'church of the home' have been rediscovered during the Second Vatican Council in its references to the 'domestic church'. Since then this concept has been quite prominent in the teaching of Paul VI and especially John Paul II, but ecclesiologists seldom reflect on this topic, which they associate with marriage and family, and therefore they relegate this discussion to their colleagues in pastoral theology. In a recent exception to this tendency, Florence Caffrey Bourg, making use of Rahnerian insights, defines domestic churches as these families where God's sacramental presence "is recognized and responded to in the guise of seemingly ordinary signs." It would, however, in my opinion, also make sense to pay attention to the distinct roles which the family members – and thus, also children – assume within the domestic church. Is it not possible to regard the domestic church as the place where family members are remembered "that it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs"? (Mk 10:14)

After investigating and commenting upon the (lack of) attention given to children in post-conciliar reflections on the domestic church by the magisterium and the theologians of the Roman Catholic Church, I will ask myself whether Roman Catholic ecclesiology cannot learn something from Schleiermacher in this respect. As Dawn DeVries indicates in her contribution to a recent reader on *The Child in Christian Thought*, the description of the celebration of Christmas Eve in a family of Prussian citizens in Schleiermacher's 1806 novella *Die Weihnachtsfeier: Ein Gespräch* has been influenced by Schleiermacher's own education among the Moravian Pietists. If Schleiermacher's novella can therefore also be interpreted as a reflection on the Christian family as "a church within the church", then it is remarkable that within this church children are explicitly esteemed as "the pure revelation of the divine". (KGA I/5: 51) We will therefore end our paper with a reflection on the significance of Schleiermacher's reflections on religious education and worship in the family for the construction of a contemporary Roman Catholic ecclesiology of the domestic church. Our interest in developing an ecclesiology of the domestic church will hopefully match with the conference organisers' request to elaborate "an adequate "theology of the family" (question 2.2.), among other things by borrowing insights from Schleiermacher (question 3.4.).

References

Florence Caffrey Bourg, "Domestic Church: A New Frontier in Ecclesiology," *Horizons* 29 (2002): 42-63.

Dawn DeVries, "'Be Converted and Become as Little Children': Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Religious Significance of Childhood," in Marcia J. Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001) 329-349.

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, *Die Weihnachtsfeier: Ein Gespräch*, in *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Hans Joachim Birkner et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984-), I/5: 39-100.

