THE THEOLOGICAL HISTORY OF ADOPTION I: AN ACCOUNT

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> The evangelical doctrine of Adoption – succinctly described as 'an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges, of the sons of God' – has received but slender treatment at the hands of theologians. It has been handled with a meagreness entirely out of proportion to its intrinsic importance, and with a subordination which allows it only a parenthetical place in the system of evangelical truth.
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> Robert A. Webb, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*

Over recent years a small but growing number of Reformed Christians have noted the need for the recovery of adoption (*huiothesia*, Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5), one of the most underrated doctrines of Holy Scripture.[1] Not since the fallout from the short-lived Crawford/Candlish

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[1] See Gordon Cooke's paper, 'The Doctrine of Adoption and the Preaching of Jeremiah Burroughs' in *Eternal Light, Adoption and Livingstone*. Congregational Studies Conference Papers, 1998 (published by the Evangelical Fellowship of Evangelical Churches); S. B. Ferguson, 'The Reformed Doctrine of Sonship', in N. M. de S. Cameron and S. B. Ferguson (eds), *Pulpit and People: Essays in Honour of William Still on his 75th Birthday* (Edinburgh, 1986), pp. 81-8; Erroll Hulse, 'Recovering the Doctrine of Adoption', *Reformation Today* 105 (1988), pp. 5-14; Mark G. Johnston, *Child of a King: The Biblical Doctrine of Sonship* (Fearn, Ross-shire, 1997), p. 10; and D. F. Kelly, 'Adoption: An Undeveloped Heritage of the Westminster Standards', *Reformed Theological Review* 52 (1993), pp. 110-20. See also J. I. Packer's comments in *Knowing God*, 1975 ed. (London, 1988), pp. 255-6; Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God. From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children* (forthcoming); T. Trumper, 'The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation I: The Adoption Metaphor in Biblical Usage', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 14 (1996), pp. 129-45; 'The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation II: The Adoption Metaphor in Theological Usage', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 15 (1997), pp. 98-115; 'Adoption: The

debate of the 1860s has awareness of the neglect of the doctrine been so perceptive and the *communis consensus* so significant. As will become apparent, the fact that these late nineteenth- and twentieth-century appeals were generally made by those of a Reformed persuasion[2] indicates the slowly growing recognition that lurking in the literary and credal archives of the tradition are some isolated and long-forgotten filial or familial emphases.[3] These emphases stand out, with rare devotional and liturgical exceptions,[4] against a backdrop of sweeping nescience in the post-Reformation church at large. Thus, while this two-part series is a product of the Reformed tradition and is written with a view to the enrichment of it, it has wide-ranging application to the theology of the church at large.

Forgotten Doctrine of Westminster Soteriology', in Lynn Quigley (ed.), *Reformed Theology in Contemporary Perspective*, 1997 Rutherford House Dogmatics Conference (Edinburgh, forthcoming); N. Westhead's introductory comments in 'Adoption in the Thought of John Calvin', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 13 (1995), p. 102. For a practical theology perspective see the World Harvest Mission Training Program, 'Sonship: Discovering Liberty in the Gospel as Sons and Daughters of God', distributed by Westminster Media, 2960 W. Church Rd, Glenside, PA 19038, USA, in conjunction with J. Adams' critique, 'Biblical Sonship: An Evaluation of the Sonship Discipleship Course' (Woodruff, S.C., 1999), and the World Harvest Mission response by Stephen E. Smallman, 'A Response to "Biblical Sonship: An Evaluation of the Sonship Discipleship Course"', obtainable from World Harvest Mission, 100 West Ave., Jenkintown, PA 19046-2697, USA See also Chad B. Van Dixhoorn, 'The *Sonship* Program for Revival: A Summary and Critique', *Westminster Theological Journal* 61 (1999), pp. 227-46, and Neil Williams' paper, 'The Theology of Sonship' (World Harvest Mission, Jenkintown, PA, 2002).

2 Exceptions include Thomas A. Smail's *The Forgotten Father* (first printed 1980, reprint ed., London, 1990) and Mark Stibbe's *From Orphans to Heirs: Celebrating our Spiritual Adoption* (Oxford, 1999). Opening his foreword to Stibbe's book R. T. Kendall writes: 'The time is long overdue that the church generally should rediscover the New Testament teaching of adoption.'

3 Writing more generally, Wolfhart Pannenberg states: 'Modern Protestant theology in particular has stressed the comprehensive significance of this thought of being children of God' (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993, p. 212).

4 I have particularly in mind the Methodist emphasis on the assurance granted by the Spirit of adoption, as well as the Brethren's hymnological emphasis on adoption (*ut infra*).

Despite the longstanding, distorting and truncating nature of the lacuna to which the aforementioned appeals have pointed, it is surprising that to date little if any intensive remedial action has been undertaken. This suggests that what appeals there have been have fallen on deaf ears notwithstanding their coinciding with the modern orientation towards a more familial understanding of the gospel. Indeed, Thornton Whaling's complaint that 'the history of the doctrine of adoption is yet to be fully and adequately written'[5] is as relevant now as when he made it in the 1920s. As things stand, most theologians have either never thought seriously about the doctrine, or, alternatively, being unaware of its neglect they assume that it has been treated as sufficiently as any other element of salvation. Failing that, they interpret incorrectly the sparseness of literature on adoption as a reflection of its profile in Scripture.

The absence of progress requires then yet another appeal. In order to make this one more effective than its forerunners we have sought to go a little farther by pursuing a more determined and detailed promotion of the case for the recovery of adoption than has been witnessed hitherto.[6] The best we can do at present is to improve the weightiness of the modern and now postmodern claims filed concerning the neglect of adoption. This we have sought to achieve, first of all, by exposing as much of the scantiness of the church's reflection on adoption as is possible in the space allowed, then, in the second article, by providing a *rationale* for why the doctrine has so consistently been overlooked in the history of the church.

At the outset we are faced with a difficult decision. Should our narration of the theological history of adoption focus on those who have or those who have not written on the doctrine? There are advantages and disadvantages either way. One thing is certain, so substantive has the church's oversight been that it is in fact easier to document those who

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5 Thornton Whaling, 'Adoption', *Princeton Theological Review* 21 (1923), p. 234. Hugh Martin writes, for example, that, 'in Dr Cunningham's Lectures on Historical Theology, the doctrine is not even broached – for the simple reason that it has no history to present. The same thing is evident in Hagenbach's History of Doctrines' ('Candlish's Cunningham Lectures', *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 14, 1865, p. 728).

6 For the record, my contribution to the promotion of the recovery of adoption began with the plea for the realization of the metaphorical import of adoption (see my *SBET* articles, *op. cit.*). It continues in these articles with a more historical approach, of which more can be read in my PhD dissertation entitled, 'An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition' (University of Edinburgh, 2001). Note the change of title from that given in the original *SBET* articles.

have. The problem with this choice, however, is that by homing in on those creeds and writings that deal with adoption *in its own right* there is the risk of conveying the impression that adoption is not so neglected after all.

The opposing problem is worse. It simply is not possible to list all those who have overlooked adoption. Even if it were, it would hardly make for scintillating reading, nor would it bring to light the resources required to help stimulate creative thinking in the years to come. For example, the observation that Harnack, Dorner, Hagenbach, Charles Hodge, Robert J. Breckinridge, W. G. T. Shedd, Thomas Chalmers, George Hill, and William Cunningham (to list a few)[7] are silent about the doctrine, tells us nothing except that these theologians need not be consulted when expounding it. This, the reader will agree, is not that helpful. Thus, for practical purposes we have opted for the quieter but ultimately more effective and manageable approach.[8]

ADOPTION IN THE CHURCH'S CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS

In Philip Schaff's collection of *The Creeds of Christendom*[9] there are only six confessions that contain anything like a distinct chapter on adoption. However, given that Schaff's list is not exhaustive, we must remain open to the possibility that there are others hidden away within the annals of ecclesiastical history. In any case, the many referred to are not all cited in

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7 Edward McKinlay, 'The relation of incarnation to atonement in the Christology of R. S. Candlish and its contribution to the development of Scottish Theology' (Edinburgh University: PhD thesis, 1966), p. 110; Robert Alexander Webb, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption* (Grand Rapids, MI., 1947), p. 17. John Dick was simply wrong in asserting that 'a place is commonly assigned to [adoption] in systems of Theology' (*Lectures on Theology*, 2 vols in 1 (New York, 1851), p. 224).

8 A disclaimer is appropriate here. Despite the greater detail, what follows inevitably remains an incomplete account. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the following theological history may stimulate further research with a view to the reduction of its incompleteness.

9 *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, 3 vols, ed. P. Schaff, revd D. S. Schaff, sixth ed. reprinted from the 1931 ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, 1990). This is a particularly valid avenue of investigation given Schaff's assessment of the general credal function: 'A Creed, or Rule of Faith, or Symbol,' he says, 'is a confession of faith for public use, or a form of words setting forth with authority certain articles of belief, which are regarded by the framers as necessary for salvation, or at least for the well-being of the Christian Church' (*ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 3-4).

full. Nevertheless, the fewness of the confessions containing distinctive statements on adoption explains in part why the doctrine has been so infrequently discussed throughout the millennia of theological reflection.

As far as can be discerned, the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) was the first confession in the history of the Church to devote a whole chapter to the doctrine. Although chapter XII is the shortest in the confession, it is nevertheless of seminal credal importance:

> All those that are justified God vouchsafeth, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the adoption; by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God; have his name put upon them; receive the Spirit of adoption; have access to the throne of grace with boldness; are enabled to cry, Abba, Father; are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by him as by a father; yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of Redemption, and inherit the promises, as heirs of eternal salvation.

Given this distinctive *locus*, it is ironic that the confession has been so vilified for its juridical approach.[10] As Sinclair Ferguson reminds us, 'perhaps more than anything else it is the presence of [the twelfth chapter] which has kept alive within Presbyterianism (particularly in Scotland and the Southern Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A) the significance of Sonship in the life of Faith.'[11]

Now, without doubt, the confession's influence was aided by the answers given to Questions 34 and 74 of the Shorter and Larger Catechisms, both of which ask, 'What is Adoption?'

> *Answer 34*
> Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.

> *Answer 74*
> Adoption is an act of the free grace of God, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of his children, have his name put upon them, the Spirit of his Son given to them, are under his fatherly care and dispensations, admitted to all the

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[10] For a response to this criticism see my paper, 'Adoption: The Forgotten Doctrine of Westminster Soteriology' (*op. cit.*) or 'An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption' (*op. cit.*, chapter 5, 'The Confession of Adoption').

[11] 'The Reformed Doctrine of Sonship', *op. cit.*, p. 83.

> liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.

Indicative of the influence of the Westminster Standards is the fact that two of the other five relevant credal statements in *The Creeds of Christendom* are copied *verbatim* from the WCF. These are found in the Savoy Declaration (1658) and the Baptist Confession of Faith (1689), respectively. Interestingly, the three remaining statements were formulated between 1890 and 1925 and are by-products of the nineteenth-century drift towards a more familial understanding of the gospel.

Article XIV of the XXIV Articles of the Presbyterian Synod of England (1890), although entitled 'Of Sonship in Christ', closely follows the biblical contours of adoption:

> We believe that those who receive Christ by faith are united to Him, so that they are partakers in His life, and receive His fulness; and that they are adopted into the family of God, are made heirs with Christ, and have His Spirit abiding in them, the witness to their sonship, and the earnest of their inheritance.[12]

The Confessional Statement of the United Presbyterian Church of North America (1925), which is described by Schaff as 'the boldest official attempt within the Presbyterian family of Churches to restate the Reformed theology of the sixteenth century',[13] also contains an article on adoption. Article XI of The Basis of Union of the United Church of Canada (1925), while entitled 'Of justification and Sonship', reads:

> We believe that God, on the sole ground of the perfect obedience and sacrifice of Christ, pardons those who by faith receive Him as their Saviour and Lord, accepts them as righteous, and bestows upon them the adoption of sons, with a right to all the privileges therein implied, including a conscious assurance of their sonship.[14]

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[12] Schaff, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, 918. The New Testament, of course, includes other filial models and this is reflected, for example, in Article XI of a 'Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith' (1902), which was prepared by a committee of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and is entitled 'Of the New Birth and the New Life' (*ibid.*, p. 923).

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 924.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 936.

A *prima facie* glance at this survey demonstrates that adoption is mainly, but not exclusively, a Reformed distinctive. Various confessions of other pre- and post-Reformation traditions also make passing allusions to adoption or at least employ the sort of familial terminology that can be construed as such. These include: (1) The Councils of Toledo (675) and the Synod of Frankfurt (794), which discuss adoption in relation to the sonship of Christ;[15] (2) The Sixty-Seven Articles or Conclusions of Ulrich Zwingli (1523);[16] (3) The Anglican Catechism (1549);[17] (4) The French Confession of Faith (1559);[18] (5) The Scots Confession of Faith (1560);[19] (6) The Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent (1563);[20]

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[15] L. Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, first published 1937 (Edinburgh and Carlisle, 1969), pp. 111-12; R. S. Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God: Being the First Course of the Cunningham Lectures*, supplementary volume to the 5th ed. (Edinburgh, 1870), pp. 65-6.

[16] This, the first creed of the Reformed churches, was originally written in Zwingli's Swiss German dialect. Although possessing no specific references to adoption, two of the articles, nevertheless, include statements on the filial relationship between believers and their heavenly Father. Article VIII: 'From this follows, first, that all who live in the Head are members [*Glieder*] and are children of God [*Kinder Gottes*], and that is the Church or communion [*Gemeinschaft*] of the saints, a housewife [*hausfrau*] of Christ, the catholic church [*ecclesia catholica*].'; Article XXVII: 'That all Christian men are the brothers of Christ and are subject to one another [*unter einander*]. Therefore [*und*] no one shall *be* named Father. For this reason orders and sects *etc.* decline' (Schaff, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 198 and 201).

[17] Here too we find familial language rather than any explicit reference to adoption (*ibid.*, p. 517). The Anglican Catechism does, however, make mention of the new birth (*ibid.*, p. 521).

[18] Having been prepared by Calvin, it is no coincidence that the French Confession contains two references to adoption and one allusion. See Articles XVII, XIX and XXII (*ibid.*, pp. 369-72).

[19] Article XIII ('Of the cause of Good Works') does not actually mention adoption but is couched in terms of sonship (*ibid.*, pp. 452-3). For more on the Scots Confession see 'Adoption: The Forgotten Doctrine of Westminster Soteriology' (*op. cit.*) or 'An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption', *op. cit.*, ch. 5.

[20] Mention of adoption is made in the Decree on Justification, chapter II. In chapter IV, justification is said to involve 'a translation, from that state wherein man is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace, and of *the adoption of the sons of God*, through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Saviour' (*ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 91). Adoption is clearly implied in chapter VIII (*ibid.*, p. 97). Moreover, in chapters VII, XI and XVI there are references to

(7) The Heidelberg Catechism (1563);[21] (8) The Second Helvetic Confession (1566);[22] (9) The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1566);[23] (10) Formula Concordiae (1576 (L. 1584));[24] (11) The

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the closely related themes of inheritance and eternal life (*ibid.*, pp. 94-5, 101, and 107).

[21] Questions 33 and 120 are of greatest relevance, particularly the former: 'Question 33. Why is he called God's only-begotten Son, since we are also the children of God [*Gottes Kinder*]? Answer. Because Christ alone is the eternal natural Son of God; but we are the children of God by adoption [*Kindern Gottes angenommen sind*]' (*ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 318). For Question and Answer 120, *ibid.*, p. 351.

[22] The Second Helvetic Confession is described by Schaff as 'the last and best of the Zwinglian family' (*ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 390). He states that according to the teaching of ch. XX ('Of Holy Baptism'), 'there is only one baptism in the Church; it lasts for life, and is a perpetual seal of our adoption' (*ibid.*, p. 414).

[23] Adoption receives mention in at least two articles: Art. XVII ('Of Predestination and Election') – 'Wherefore *such as have* so excellent a benefit of God *given unto them*, to be called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season: they through grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons by adoption: they be made like unto the image of *God's* only begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity' (*ibid.*, p. 633). Schaff writes that Article XVII 'very clearly teaches a free eternal election in Christ, which carries with it, by way of execution in time, the certainty of the call, justification, adoption, sanctification, and final glorification (Rom. viii.29,30)' (*ibid.*, p. 634). *Cf.* Article XVII of The Forty-Two Articles of the Church of England (1553) in Oliver O'Donovan's *On the 39 Articles: A Conversation with Tudor Christianity*, A Latimer Monograph, reprint ed. published for Latimer House, Oxford (Carlisle, 1993), p. 142. Adoption is also mentioned under Article XXVII ('Of Baptism'): 'Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from other that be not christened: but is also a sign of regeneration or new birth, whereby as by an instrument, they that receive baptism rightly, are grafted into the Church: the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God, by the holy ghost, are visibly signed and sealed: faith is confirmed: and grace increased by virtue of the prayer unto God' (*ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 504-5). *Cf.* Article XXVIII of the Forty-two Articles in O'Donovan, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

[24] The fourth in the list of Schwenkfeldian errors complains that 'the water of baptism is not a means whereby the Lord seals adoption in the children of God and effects regeneration' (*The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, p. 178).

Saxon Visitation Articles, 1592;[25] (12) The Irish Articles of Religion (1615);[26] (13) The Canons of the Synod of Dort (1618-19);[27] (14) The Orthodox Confession of the Eastern Church (1643);[28] (15) The Confession of the Waldenses (1655);[29] (16) The Confession of Dositheus, or The Eighteen Decrees of the Synod of Jerusalem (1672);[30] (17) Easter Litany of the Moravian Church (1749);[31] (18) The Articles of Religion of the

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[25] Article III.iv states that 'baptism is the bath of regeneration, because in it we are born again, and sealed by the Spirit of adoption [*Kindheit/adoptionis*] through grace' (*ibid.*, p. 184).

[26] The section entitled 'Of God's Eternal Decree and Predestination' (Article 15) notes the Ephesians connection between adoption and predestination: 'Such as are predestined unto life be called according unto God's purpose (his spirit working in due season), and through grace they obey the calling, they be justified freely; they be made sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image of his only begotten son Jesus Christ' (*ibid.*, p. 529).

[27] Under the fifth head of Doctrine ('Of the Perseverance of the Saints'), Article VI declares that 'God, who is rich in mercy, according to his unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from his own people, even in their melancholy falls; nor suffer them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of their adoption and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin unto death; nor does he permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction' (*ibid.*, pp. 572 and 593). Adoption is also implied in connection with assurance. See Article X of the same head of doctrine (*ibid.*, pp. 573 and 594).

[28] Question XXXV contains a passing reference to adoption: 'This grace of adoption [*tēs huiothesias*] is given freely through Christ, as the Scripture says (John 1:12) as many as received him to them he gave the authority to become the children of God' (*ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 316-17).

[29] Article XXIX: 'That Christ has instituted the sacrament of Baptism to be a testimony of our adoption, and that therein we are cleansed from our sins by the blood of Jesus Christ, and renewed in holiness of life' (*ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 766).

[30] The end of Decree XVI speaks of the receipt (*analambanō* of adoption (*huiothesia*) upon return to the Lord through the mystery of repentance (*ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 427).

[31] 'I believe in God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath... made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: having predestined us unto the adoption of children [*zur Kindschaft*] by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved' (*ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 799; *cf.* p. 802).

Reformed Episcopal Church in America (1875);[32] (19) A Commission of the National Council of the Congregational Churches of the U.S.'s statement of doctrine (1883).[33]

This list is lengthy and thereby somewhat deceptive, simply because it includes even the very faintest allusions to the familial implications of the gospel that can be gleaned from Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom*. The list cannot then in all honesty be used to deny the substantial neglect of adoption. The evidence will not allow it, as is surely verified by the small number of confessions that allot adoption a distinct chapter or section.

The truth is that adoption has rarely been accorded official credal recognition. When referred to at all, it is usually mentioned in connection with predestination, assurance or the sacrament of baptism. Indeed, we may infer this oversight of adoption from Schaff's comment that 'a creed may cover the whole ground of Christian doctrine and practice, or contain only such points as are deemed *fundamental* and *sufficient*'.[34] That adoption has, historically, been deemed generally to lie outwith the fundamental or sufficient elements of the gospel is itself indicative of the church's inadequate understanding of the role and importance of the doctrine for her grasp of salvation.

ADOPTION IN THE CHURCH'S CORPUS

Typically speaking, the neglect that adoption has suffered has been masked by two factors: First, by its usual inclusion in the relevant dictionaries and lexical aids, and, second, by the filial awareness ideally characteristic of the Christian life, resulting from the possession of the Spirit of adoption.[35]

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[32] Although adoption is not mentioned explicitly, the tenor of these articles is most relational. The closest to a specific reference is found in Article XIV ('Of the Sonship of Believers'). However, the article alludes to regeneration as much as to adoption (*ibid.*, p. 819; *cf.* Article X, *ibid.*, p. 817).

[33] Article VII merely acknowledges that 'through the person and work of Jesus Christ as mediator and redeemer and sender of the Holy Spirit, those trusting in him are made the children of God' (*ibid.*, p. 914).

[34] *Ibid.*, vols 1, 4 (italics inserted).

[35] The reader is referred to the relevant lexicons and dictionaries: *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology*. S.v. 'Adoption as sons' by H. P. C. Lyons; *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*. S.v. «Grace (II. Le Mystère de la Filiation Adoptive)» by Charles Baumgartner; *Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. J. H. Blunt (London, Oxford and Cambridge, 1872), pp. 5-6; *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. S.v. '*huiothesia, as, hē*';

However, neither the proliferation of dictionary entries nor the availability of the language of *Abba* in the household of faith has served to bring adoption into the regular theological currency of the church. It seems that the doctrine has been lost somewhere between etymological investigation and filial praise. Nowhere is this more evident than in a general perusal of the major figures of historical theology, which more than confirms the story told by the creeds and confessions.

J. I. Packer states that 'it is a strange fact that the truth of adoption has been little regarded in Christian history'. 'There is,' he continues, 'no evangelical writing on [adoption], nor has there been at any time since the Reformation, any more than there was before.'[36] Similarly Edward McKinlay notes that 'the failure to consider, and adequately to develop along satisfactory lines, the doctrine of adoption, can be traced back to the early Fathers of the Church'.[37] The accuracy of these assessments is generally attested to by the sheer dearth of monographs devoted to adoption. To our knowledge there are but two serious monographs, both of which are post-Reformation products of the Reformed faith, the first of which, however, being a practical treatise.[38] Generally, however, the writings of pre- and post-Reformation theologians contain only fleeting allusions to adoption, but even then what references there are are usually located in discussions of other doctrines. In those isolated instances where

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Dictionnaire Latin-Français des Auteurs Chrétiens. S.v. «adoptarius» *et al.* by Albert Blaise; *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*. S.v. 'Adoption' by C. F. D. Moule; *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. S.v. '*huiothesia, hē*'; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. S.v. '*huiothesia*' by Eduard Schweitzer.

36 *Op. cit.*, p. 255.

37 Edward McKinlay, 'The relation of incarnation to atonement in the Christology of R. S. Candlish, and its contribution to the development of Scottish Theology' (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1966), p. 106.

38 See T. Houston, *The Adoption of Sons, its Nature, Spirit, Privileges, and Effects: A Practical and Experimental Treatise* (Paisley, 1872), and R. A. Webb, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1947). Both volumes are out of print.

Mention could also be made of J. L. Girardeau's ninety pages on adoption in his *Discussions of Theological Questions* (Harrisonburg, VA, 1986), pp. 428-521. Evidence from the Blackburn Collection (Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS) reveals, however, that Girardeau's treatment of adoption is composed of a collation of several papers written at various points during his ministry. This explains in part the inordinate amount of attention accorded to the question of Adam's status in Eden.

adoption does obtain its own section, the sections have usually been too obscure to attract much attention.

Beginning with the patristic period, it is probably true to say that the Greek Fathers overlooked adoption less than their Latin counterparts.[39] J. Scott Lidgett suggests for example that, 'nowhere can we find more emphatic and constant reference to the "adoption of sons" as the characteristic gift to believers in Christ than in Irenaeus'.[40] Although this claim is more appropriately made of Calvin,[41] nevertheless the adoption motif does figure in Irenaeus' theology as a cognate theme of the

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[39] The search through the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* for the stem *huioth-* reveals that in addition to the five usages in the New Testament, the following employ or contain some form of *huiothesia*: Lycrophon (1) (4th-3rd century BC); Diodorus Siculus (3) (ante 3rd century BC?); Herodianus et Pseudo-Her (1), Acta Pauli (3) and Irenaeus (4) (2nd century AD); Claudius Aelianus (2), Clemens Alexandrinus (17), Origenes (53) (2nd-3rd centuries AD); Diogenes Laertius (1) and Hippolytus (5) (3rd century AD); Gregorius Nyssenus (10), Eusebius (1), Epiphanius (12), Gregorius Nazianzenus (4), Marcellus (3), Pseudo-Macarius (14), Amphilochius (6), Etropius (1) and Severianus (1) (4th century AD); Joannes Chrysostomus (10), Palladius (1) and Theodoretus (46) (4th-5th centuries AD); Hesychius (2) (5th century AD); Joannes Laurentius (1) (6th century AD); Theophylactus Simocatta (1) (7th century AD); Joannes Damascenus (42) (7th-8th centuries AD); Georgius Monachus (6) and Photius (33) (9th century AD); Constantinus VII Porphyroge (4) and Suda (6) (10th century AD); Michael Psellus (4) (11th century AD); Anna Comnena (3) (11th-12th centuries AD); Nicephorus Gregoras (5) (13th-14th centuries AD); Concilia Oecumenica (21) (varia). Given what I have argued in my *SBET* articles (*op. cit.*) concerning the distinctively Pauline emphasis on adoption, it is worth noting Pannenberg's comment that the Greek fathers interpreted salvation along the lines of Johannine thought (*op. cit.*, pp. 213-14). A computer-aided search of the Latin Fathers is, at the time of writing, unavailable to the author.

[40] J. Scott Lidgett, *The Fatherhood of God in Christian Truth and Life* (Edinburgh, 1902), p. 160. Lidgett describes Irenaeus' importance for the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God as unique. Irenaeus, he claims, 'is the teacher, above all others, of the Fatherhood of God' (*ibid.*, *cf.* pp. 153 and 156). For the reasons behind Irenaeus' emphasis, see *ibid.*, pp. 156-7.

[41] In addition to what is said of Calvin below, see Part One of 'An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption' (*op. cit.*), where there is an extensive overview of the reformer's rich theology of adoption.

Fatherhood of God.[42] Regrettably, however, Irenaeus failed to work through the implications of divine paternity for his theology.

Later third- and fourth-century Greek fathers of the Alexandrian tradition also demonstrated interest in the familial themes of Scripture. Origen (c.185-c.254), for instance, keenly investigated the relationship between Christ's only-begotten Sonship and the adoptive sonship of believers.[43] According to Widdicombe, however, 'it was not until the fourth century with Athanasius [c.297-373] that the fatherhood of God became an issue of sustained and systematic analysis'.[44] Once it did, there developed the Alexandrian reflection on the Johannine model of rebirth and the Pauline model of adoption. These models became especially fundamental to 'Athanasian' soteriology.[45]

In the West, meanwhile, Loughran claims that the fathers failed to follow the adoptive interest of the East.[46] Catholic scholars are divided on this however. Lyons asserts that 'adoptive sonship is no less clearly taught by the Latin fathers'.[47] Yet that does not say much, for he argues that

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[42] Although adoption receives numerous mentions in *Adversus Haereses* it receives only one in *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching,* trans. from the Armenian with Introduction and Notes by J. Armitage Robinson (London and New York, 1920). The profile of adoption in *Adversus Haereses* is confirmed by an unpublished doctoral class paper by David B. Garner entitled 'Irenaeus: Fountain Father of Adoption Theology' submitted December 1999, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. For other helpful information, see J. Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus* (London, 1948), pp. 157-8; R. Noorman, *Irenaeus als Paulusinterpret: zur Rezeption und Wirkung der Paulinischen und Deuteropaulischen Briefe im Werk des Irenaeus von Lyon* (Tübingen, 1994), particularly pp. 410-16 and 487-92.

[43] P. Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius.* Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford, 1994), pp. 79 and 93-118. Widdicombe overlooks Irenaeus when he writes that the Fatherhood of God 'has a perceptible prominence for him [Origen] that it did not have for earlier Christian writers' (*ibid.*, p. 7; contrast Lidgett, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-3).

[44] *Op. cit.*, p. 1.

[45] Widdicombe, *op. cit.*, p. 145. Contrast Lidgett's less favourable assessment of Athanasius: 'The Father is insufficiently manifested in and through the Son to men; and men are insufficiently brought, in the Son, to the Father' (*op. cit.*, p. 180).

[46] *New Catholic Encyclopaedia.* S.v. 'Adoption, Supernatural' by M. M. Loughran.

[47] *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology.* S.v. 'Adoption of sons' by H. P. C. Lyons.

'even St. Augustine does not seem to grasp the richness of its implications nor does he integrate it into his teaching on grace'. Lidgett is more critical still: 'With the theology of Augustine the Fatherhood of God... passed entirely out of sight. It had been replaced by the conception of His sovereignty.'

Recent scholarship is more cautious. In drawing a connection between adoption and the neglected concept of deification, Gerald Bonner claims that Augustine's neo-platonically influenced view of deification is nevertheless equivalent to the New Testament use of *huiothesia*.[48] For proof of this, he points to Augustine's *Epistulae ad Galatas expositio* (24.8) and his *Tractates on St John's Gospel*.[49] Interestingly, Augustine's references to deification are plainly in full agreement with the Greek concepts espoused by Irenaeus and Athanasius.[50]

In the millennium following Augustine western interest in the Fatherhood of God waned as the sovereignty of God came to dominate dogmatic interest.[51] Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* is said to illustrate this. Loughran argues that Anselm's juridical view of redemption, which focuses on the necessary infinite satisfaction of Christ, constrained him to work from the premise of God's sovereignty rather than his love.[52] Similarly, Aquinas is said not only to have ignored the Fatherhood of God but to have consciously dispensed with it: 'Every line of the theology of Aquinas has... gone, not only to make the Divine sovereignty the only conceivable relationship between God and man, but also to externalise and harden it.'[53]

By the Reformation, then, western soteriology had, it appears, become thoroughly juridical. The predominant Augustinian emphasis on God's sovereignty was combined with the rigorous and polemical dissection of

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[48] Gerald Bonner, 'Augustine's Conception of Deification', *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, 37 (1986), pp. 377, 378, 381, 384. I am indebted to Dr Angus Morrison, Church of Scotland Minister, the Isle of Lewis, for some pointers concerning Augustine.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 377.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 376. The consistency between Augustine and Irenaeus is interesting because Dietrich Ritschl attributes to Irenaeus' influence Hippolytus' development of a doctrine of participation in Christ, which he expressed in terms of deification and mystical union ('Hippolytus' Conception of Deification: Remarks on the Interpretation of Refutation X', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 12, Dec. 1959, p. 388).

[51] Lidgett, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-200; *contra* Whaling, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

[52] 'Adoption, Supernatural', *op. cit.*, p. 139.

[53] Lidgett, *op. cit.*, pp. 217 and 220.

justification by the reformers, so increasing the attention given to the forensic element of the gospel, with the result that 'the subject of adoption, or the sonship of Christ's disciples, did not... occupy the place and receive the prominence to which it is on scriptural grounds entitled'.[54]

Thus, despite the impact of Paul's Roman and Galatian epistles on Luther (which, remember, contain four of the five NT uses of *huiothesia*), Lidgett explains that 'the graciousness – and indeed fatherliness – of God in Christ is not, for the most part, expressed [by Luther]... strictly in terms of Fatherhood'.[55] According to Brigit Stolt, it was only on becoming a father himself that Luther realized the loving, comforting and joy-giving nature of the Fatherhood of God. Prior to that his understanding of divine paternity was affected by the austerity of his own experience of childhood.[56]

In contrast to Luther, Lidgett rightly, but to many surprisingly, claims that 'no other writer of the Reformation makes such use of the Fatherhood of God [or, we may add, of adoption] as does Calvin.'[57] Although the

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[54] R. S. Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God: Being the First Course of the Cunningham Lectures*, fifth ed. (Edinburgh, 1869), p. 192. *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 240-47; McKinlay, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-6.

[55] *Op. cit.*, p. 251. See M. Luther, *Works*, vol. 25, ed. H. C. Oswald (Saint Louis, 1972), pp. 71-3; and vol. 27, ed. J. Pelikan (Saint Louis, 1964), pp. 288-91. There is adequate proof of this from Luther's sermons. Although his sermon on Galatians 4:1-7 is couched in terms of justification he refers to believers as the children or sons of God, but only mentions adoption once in addition to the apposite biblical references (*Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed. John Nicholas Lenker, trans. John Nicholas Lenker and others, vol. 6, Sermons on Epistle Texts for Advent and Christmas, Grand Rapids, MI, 1988, pp. 224-66). His most pertinent comment on adoption is found in his sermon on Galatians 3:23-29. Referring to verses 26-27, Luther writes: 'Christ is the child of God; therefore, he who clothes himself in Christ, God's son, must be the child of God. He is clothed with divine adoption, which unquestionably must constitute him a child of God' (*ibid.*, p. 287). In his two sermons on Romans 8:18-22, Luther again has plenty on the believers' status as children of God, but mentions adoption just the once in a quotation of Romans 8:23 (*ibid.*, vol. 8, Sermons on Epistle Texts for Trinity Sunday to Advent with an Index of Sermon Texts in Volumes 1-8, pp. 96-118).

[56] Brigit Stolt, 'Martin Luther on God as a Father', *Lutheran Quarterly*, New Series, 8 (1994), pp. 389-90.

[57] *Op. cit.*, p. 253. See Marc Lienhard, 'Luther et Calvin: Commentateurs du notre Père', Revue D'Histoire et de Philosphie Religieuses 72 (1992/1), pp. 73-88.

Genevan reformer provides no separate section on adoption in the *Institutes*, it is evident that the motif was most important for him.

In *The True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom, and of Reforming the Church*, he boldly describes the grace of adoption as 'not the cause merely of a partial salvation, but [that which] bestows salvation entire [and] which is afterwards ratified by baptism'.[58] In his commentary on 2 Corinthians 1:20, he asserts that chief of all the promises that in Christ are 'yea' and 'amen' is that 'by which He adopts us as His sons'. This means that Christ is 'the cause and root of our adoption'.[59] In the *Institutes* he asserts that the authority of the entire gospel is embraced in adoption and the effecting of salvation.[60] This he unpacks in the preamble to his commentary on Ephesians: 'God's wonderful mercy shines forth in the fact that the salvation of men flows from His free adoption as its true and native source.'[61] From Calvin's description of his conversion, written just prior to his death, we are able to tell that these sentiments of his were not just theological abstractions. Rather, in death as in life he believed that he had 'no other defence or refuge for salvation than [God's] gratuitous adoption, on which alone [his] salvation depend[ed]'.[62]

Although we cannot be entirely sure what the implications of these sentiments are for Calvin's theology,[63] they are certainly substantive evaluations requiring greater attention among Calvin scholars than has been the case hitherto. According to Garret Wilterdink, 'for Calvin, adoption into the family of God is synonymous with salvation'.[64] It is just

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58 *Tracts*, vol. 3, p. 275. The whole sentence reads in Latin: 'Baptismum ergo praecedat adoptionis gratia, necesse est: quae non dimidiae tantum salutis causa est, sed eam ipsam salutem in solidum affert, quae baptismo deinde sancitur' [*CO* 7 (35):619].

59 *CC 2 Cor.*, 22 [*CO* 50 (78):23].

60 *Inst.* III.xxv.3 [*CO* 2 (30):730]; *cf.* Parker, *Calvin*, p. 123.

61 *CC* Eph., 121 [*CO* 51(79):141].

62 'Life of John Calvin' (*Tracts*, vol. 1, cxxiv [*CO* 21 (49):162]).

63 This hesitance is a climb-down from the bolder position taken in my 1997 Rutherford House Dogmatics Conference paper (*op. cit.*). The matter is eagerly commended to Calvin scholars as a fruitful topic of research.

64 Garret A. Wilterdink, 'The Fatherhood of God in Calvin's Thought', *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism*, vol., 9. *Calvin's Theology, Theology Proper, Eschatology*, ed. Richard C. Gamble (New York & London, 1992), p. 185; see also *Tyrant or Father? A Study of Calvin's Doctrine of God*, vol. 1, Scholastic Monograph Series (Bristol, IN, 1985), p. 21. Similarly, but in reference to the *Institutes*, Sinclair Ferguson writes: 'While there is no separate chapter on sonship in the *Institutes*, *adoptio* (sonship) is one of

a pity that, for whatever reason, his layout of the *Institutes* does not reflect the important place the doctrine occupies in his theology. That later Calvinism failed to pick up on this is in part due to Calvin's decision not to apportion the doctrine a section in the *Institutes*.

Calvin, although of seminal importance, was not alone among the reformers in dealing with adoption. In his *Loci Communes* Calvin's older correspondent Peter Martyr Vermigli (1500-1562)[65] relates adoption to the old and new covenant, the differences between the Son and the sons, union with Christ, and in expounding Romans 8:15.[66] In the process he makes mention of Chrysostom, Augustine and Ambrose.[67]

Not surprisingly, John Knox (c.1515-1572), having spent a few years in Calvin's Geneva, also mentions adoption, thereby capturing in part some of the familial atmosphere present in Calvin's work, yet which was to recede in later Calvinism. We find this especially in Knox's lengthy tract *On Predestination in Answer to the Cavillations by an Anabaptist, 1560.*[68] There he mentions adoption but only in connection with

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the expressions by which he most frequently designates the idea of being a Christian. He does not treat sonship as a separate *locus* of theology precisely because it is a concept which undergirds everything he writes' ('The Reformed Doctrine of Sonship', *op. cit.*, p. 82).

65 In his foreword to Joseph C. McLelland's volume, *The Visible Words of God: An Exposition of the Sacramental Theology of Peter Martyr Vermigli A.D. 1500-1562* (Edinburgh and London, 1957), p. vi, T. F. Torrance writes: 'Peter Martyr was undoubtedly one of the finest scholars and ablest theologians of his generation and must be ranked close to Calvin himself with whom he stood in the highest estimation and with whom he was in the fullest agreement' (*cf.* pp. 35, 278-81).

66 See 'De adoptione Dei. Ex Rom. 8. cap. ver. 15' in *Loci Commvnes D. Petri Martyris Vermilii, florentini, Sacrarvm Literarvm in Schola Tigvrina* (Londini, 1583), pp. 502-4. *The Common Places of the Most Famous and Renowmed* [*sic*] *Diuine Doctor Peter Martyr, diuided into foure principall parts: with a large addition of Manie Theological and Necessarie discourses, some never extant before.* Trans. and partlie gathered by Anthonie Marten, 1583, Pt. II: xvi, xviii; III: iii.

67 Augustine: 594b, III:iii, 80b, III:iv, 153b; Chrysostom: 592b, 594a; Ambrose: 594b, 595a, III:iii, 82a.

68 For Knox's tract *On Predestination* see John Knox, *Works*, vol. 5, collected and edited by David Laing (Edinburgh, 1895), pp. 7-468. Knox's more notable statements relate to the Fatherhood of God (pp. 27, 35, 50, 56, 82, 130, 204-5, 231, 241, 254, 376-7, 394-5, 412); children of God (pp. 21, 23, 28, 52, 58, 81, 87, 92, 96, 210, 235, 236, 237, 249, 250, 257, 273, 285, 301, 338, 340, 356, 376-7, 383, 394-5, 403, 414, 415, 417); sons

predestination.[69] Predestination, he says, is 'the eternall and immutable decree of God, by which he hath once determined with himself what He will have to be done with everie man.'[70] Those called before all time God has loved in Christ. These are assured of their adoption by their justification through faith. Soteric predestination formed, then, Knox's proof of the freeness of salvation.[71] 'We affirm, those whom he [God] judgeth worthie of participation of salvation to be adoptate and chosen of his free mercie for no respect of their own dignitie.'[72]

Despite the interest of Calvin, Peter Martyr and John Knox, for reasons discussed elsewhere, it was not long before the filial or familial tenor of Reformed theology was lost. Here we may just note the fact that Heinrich Heppe in his *Reformed Dogmatics* alludes to adoption in reference to but three theologians – Andreas Hyperius (1511-1564), Franciscus Burman (1628-1679) and Johann Heinrich Heidegger (1633-98).[73] Although Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics* is a secondary source his scant allusions certainly resonate with what we know of the loss of adoption's profile in the theological discussions of seventeenth-century continental Protestantism.[74] That said, two other interested theologians of the Dutch Second Reformation come to mind.[75] First, there was Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711) of Rotterdam who included a chapter on adoption in the soteriological section of *The Christian's Reasonable Service*.[76] Then

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of God (pp. 310 (*cf.* 312), 413, 417, 418); adoption (pp. 26, 36, 38, 44, 169); children of the devil (pp. 131, 136).

69 Note Knox's use of Ephesians 1:4-5, which text generally provided for the reformers the *locus classicus* of predestination (*ibid.*, p. 44).

70 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 26; *cf.* 169.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

73 For further biographical details see *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. S.v. 'Hyperius' by H Weissgerber; 'Burman' by W. F. Dankbaar and 'Heidegger' by J. F. G. Goeters.

74 Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set out and Illustrated from the Sources*, English trans. G. T. Thomson, first published in Great Britain, 1950 (reprint ed., Grand Rapids, MI, 1978), p. 552.

75 For a short history of the Dutch Second Reformation see J. Beeke's *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation*. American University Studies, Series VII, Theology and Religion, vol. 89 (New York, 1991), pp. 387-95.

76 Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service in which Divine Truths concerning the Covenant of Grace are Expounded, Defended against Opposing Parties, and their Practice Advocated as well as the Administration of this Covenant in the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 2,

there was Alexander Comrie (1706-1774), a native of Scotland. Comrie distinguished between an assurance of the uprightness of faith and the assurance of adoption – the former being contingent on an indirect work of the Spirit to aid the believer's reasoning and the latter, being divinely reserved for a minority of believers, on a direct and immediate sealing of the Spirit.[77]

In England, meanwhile, the Puritans – who had been influential in the development of Dutch Puritanism *via* the work of Willem Teellinck (1579-1629)[78] – were busy breaking new ground. Ironically, the same Assembly that drew up a seminal credal chapter on adoption stopped short of making the Fatherhood of God and adoption regulative in the Standards they produced. Thus, despite their experimental emphases, 'the Puritan teaching on the Christian life, so strong in other ways, was notably deficient here, which is one reason why legalistic misunderstandings of it so easily arise'.[79]

The Puritans left, therefore, an ambiguous legacy. While it would be incorrect to claim that they overlooked adoption, their treatments leave much to be desired. Certainly there was a filial or familial tenor to some of their sermons,[80] but with the exception of expositions of the Shorter and

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trans. Bartel Elshout based on the 3rd ed. of the original Dutch work entitled *Redelijke Godsdienst* published by D. Bolle, Rotterdam, The Netherlands (Ligonier, PA, 1993), pp. 415-38.

77 Beeke, *op. cit.*, pp. 298ff.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 118ff..

79 Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 255-6. *Cf.* Hulse, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

80 See, for example, Roger Drake's sermon in *Puritan Sermons 1659-1689: Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate, St. Giles in the Fields, and in Southwark by Seventy-five Ministers of the Gospel*, vol. 5 (Wheaton, IL, 1981, originally published London, 1660), pp. 328-44. For lesser examples see the sermons by William Cooper (*ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 129-53), William Bates (*ibid.*, pp. 368-77) and Richard Mayo (*ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 253-63).

In Cooke's paper, 'The Doctrine of Adoption and the Preaching of Jeremiah Burroughs', he notes that although Burroughs did not write a treatise on adoption, deep within his 41 sermons on the Beatitudes are two sermons on adoption, taken from Matthew 5:9: 'Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God.' Cooke comments: '... – perhaps not the first verse from which we would preach adoption', but unwisely adds that, 'the Puritans didn't preach in the exegetical straightjackets we impose upon ourselves!' (*op. cit.*, p. 25). Here Cooke betrays a lack of objectivity too often characteristic of the conservative Reformed appreciation of the Puritans. Had they allowed for the authorial

Larger Catechism too few of the Puritans dealt with the doctrine as a distinct theological *locus*. Notable exceptions include William Ames (1576-1633) and his 27 characteristics of adoption,[81] Thomas Watson with his chapter on adoption in *A Body of Divinity*,[82] as also Herman Witsius (1636-1708) in *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*.[83] Characteristic of those treatments that do exist is the practice of reading Paul's doctrine into John, thus confusing the apostles' distinctive models of adoption and the new birth. Thereafter, the practice became *pro forma* in the tradition.

Other significant Puritans such as Thomas Goodwin (1600-1679) and John Owen (1616-1683) refer to the doctrine merely in relation to other issues such as predestination[84] and communion with God.[85] While it is a shame that two such prominent Puritans did not exemplify the importance of the distinctive treatment of adoption, Ferguson is of the opinion that as far as Owen is concerned this highest privilege of grace is subsumed under

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diversity of Scripture they would have been better placed to perceive Paul's distinctive use of *huiothesia*, which is essential to an awareness of the redemptive-historical unfolding of adoption.

81 W. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. from the third Latin edition, 1629, and ed. John D. Eusden (Durham, NC, 1983), pp. 164-7.

82 T. Watson, *A Body of Divinity Contained in Sermons upon the Westminster Assembly's Catechism*, first published as part of *A Part of Practical Divinity*, 1692. First Banner of Truth Trust edition reprinted from the 1890 ed., 1958 (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA, 1965), pp. 231-40.

83 H. Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, vol. 1, pp. 447-72. *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, S.v. 'Witsius, Herman (1636-1708)' by W. F. Dankbaar.

84 *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D. D.* With a general preface by John C. Miller and memoir by Robert Halley, vol. 1, containing an exposition of the first chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians (Edinburgh and London, 1861), pp. 83-102.

85 *The Works of John Owen*, ed. W. H. Gould, vol. 2, first published by Johnstone & Hunter, 1850-53. Facsimile reprint ed. (Edinburgh, 1966), pp. 5-274. See particularly pp. 207-22. Owen also has a short treatment of Galatians 4:6 in his treatise 'A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer' in vol. 4. Facsimile reprint ed. (Edinburgh, 1967), pp. 265-70. For a nineteenth-century comparison of Owen and Goodwin on adoption in relation to the sonship of Christ, see Hugh Martin, 'Candlish's Cunningham Lectures', *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 14 (1865), p. 780.

communion with Christ precisely to emphasize that the grace of adoption is only possible through the Son.[86]

Later in Scotland some interest in adoption became evident in the work of Thomas Boston (1676-1732).[87] In his *Complete Body of Divinity* he regards it as a distinct benefit of effectual calling.[88] In his *View of the Covenant of Grace* he deals among other things with the promissory aspects of the covenant, part of which pledges a new and saving covenant-relationship to God that is built on reconciliation, adoption and Yahweh's commitment to be the God of his people.[89] Thus, Boston illustrates the importance of challenging the frequent charge that federal theology is exclusively forensic and prone to legalism.[90]

Boston died just as the phenomenal rise of Methodism was beginning. Although the Methodists were not noted for their profound theological acumen, their experiential emphasis on assurance, understood in terms of the 'Spirit of adoption',[91] impacted upon the homiletics and hymnody of the period. The filial tenor of Methodist devotion is well illustrated in Howell Harris' testimony to his conversion:

> June 18th 1735, being in secret prayer, I felt suddenly my heart melting within me like wax before the fire with love to God my Saviour; and also

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[86] S. B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA, 1987), p. 89.

[87] Although McGowan's volume on Boston, *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston,* Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology (Edinburgh, 1997) contains much helpful detail and argumentation, he falls into the same trap as many an orthodox Calvinist; that is, of discussing justification and sanctification without paying heed to the place of adoption in Boston's thought. He only introduces adoption as a foray into the thought of Stephen Charnock to show in Reformed theology that adoption is usually treated in connection with regeneration (*ibid.*, pp. 108 and 109; *cf.* p. 100).

[88] *The Whole Works of the Late Reverend Thomas Boston of Ettrick*, vol. 1 (Aberdeen, 1848), pp. 612-53; vol. 2, pp. 15-36.

[89] *Works*, vol. 8, pp. 483-6.

[90] The most ardent critic of late has been James B. Torrance. He wrongly, but somewhat understandably, claims that 'the federal scheme has substituted a *legal* understanding of man for a *filial*. That is, God's prime purpose for man is legal, not filial, but this yields an impersonal view of man as the object of justice, rather than as primarily the object of love. We can give people their "legal rights" but not see them as our brothers.' Wilhelm H. Neuser, *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor*, International Congress on Calvin Research (Grand Rapids, MI, 1994), p. 35.

[91] *New Dictionary of Theology.* S.v. 'Sonship' by Ralph P. Martin.

> felt not only love, peace, etc., but longing to be dissolved, and to be with Christ. Then was a cry in my inmost soul, which I was totally unacquainted with before, Abba, Father! Abba, Father! I could not help calling God my Father; I knew that I was His child, and that He loved me and heard me.[92]

For others of the period, however, the application of adoption ranged wider than the improvement of devotion. Baptists such as John Gill (1697-1771) saw in adoption an additional *apologia* of the free and sovereign grace of God. As we shall see in the second article the place of adoption in Gill's *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* contrasted markedly with the contradictory fortunes of the doctrine among Wesleyan Methodists.[93]

With the development of the Brethren movement in the nineteenth-century there was repeated much of the spirit of Methodism. While J. N. Darby has little to say of adoption in his 34 volumes of *Collected Writings*,[94] his theology nevertheless retains something of the familial imagery and tenor of Scripture.[95] This is reflected rather uniquely in Brethren hymnody, which contrasts markedly with, for example, Reformed compilations.[96]

In the intervening period Presbyterians had unwittingly and almost universally settled for a truncated proclamation of their confession's soteriology. Eventually this truncation contributed to the provocation of the early nineteenth-century rejection of the juridical emphasis predominant

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92 Cited by E. Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales* (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA, 1985), p. 53. See also George Whitefield's account of his conversion as cited by John Stoughton in his *History of England from the Opening of the Long Parliament to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 6, *The Church in the Georgian Era* (London, 1881), pp. 125-6.

93 See Book VI chapters 9 and 10 of Gill's *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* in his *Body of Divinity*, reprinted from the London edition of 1839 (Atlanta, GA, 1950), pp. 518-28.

94 J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings*, ed. William Kelly, 34 vols (Lancing, Sussex, 1964 (?)-1967).

95 See, for instance, Darby's treatments on 'The Prodigal with the Father' (*ibid.*, vol. 12); 'Notes on Romans – Ch. 8' (*ibid.*, vol. 26); 'Notes on the Epistle to the Ephesians' (*ibid.*, vol. 27); 'Fellowship with the Father and with the Son' (*ibid.*, vol. 28); 'On Sealing with the Holy Ghost' (*ibid.*, vol. 31).

96 See *Hymns and Spiritual Songs for the Little Flock*. Selected 1856. Revised edn (Kingston-on-Thames, 1962).

among Westminster Calvinists.[97] Thomas Erskine of Linlathen and John McLeod Campbell became prominent agitators for a renewed accent on the Fatherhood of God. So widespread did this initially romantic then Broad School emphasis become, that when, in the 1860s, Robert Candlish confronted the issue from what he believed to be an orthodox Calvinistic point of view, he could only evoke a short-lived debate with his fellow Calvinist Thomas Crawford. Even then, interest was not guaranteed. When Daniel Dewar (1788-1867), Principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen, published his three-volume series entitled *Elements of Systematic Divinity* three years later, it is significant that his chapter on adoption made no mention of Candlish's Cunningham Lectures.[98] Not all were silent, however. In *Man's Relations to God*[99] the renowned Free Churchman John Kennedy of Dingwall attempted to cut through the dense complexities of the arguments involved.

Kennedy was not alone. Across the Atlantic the insights of James Henley Thornwell (1812-1862) and Robert J Breckinridge (1800-1871),[100] coupled with the stimulus of the Candlish/Crawford debate encouraged the Southern Presbyterians John L. Girardeau (1825-1898) and Robert A. Webb (1856-1919)[101] to investigate further the doctrine of adoption. Although their treatments were of limited success they did at least increase the amount of resources available from which the long hoped-for recovery can draw. The same may be said of the brief and less polemical treatment of the Southern Baptist John L. Dagg (1794-1884). In his *Manual of*

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97 For an informative list of those prominent historical and systematic theologians in Germany, USA and Scotland who omit adoption from their tomes, see McKinlay, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

98 Dewar's treatment lacks Candlish's unhealthy and sometimes speculative preoccupation with Adam's sonship. Daniel Dewar, *Elements of Systematic Divinity*, vol. 2 (Glasgow, 1867), pp. 488-503.

99 John Kennedy, *Man's Relations to God: Traced in the Light of 'the Present Truth'*, reprinted from the 1869 ed. (Edinburgh, 1995). It was during the same period, but unrelated to the debate, that Thomas Houston published his experimental monograph on adoption in 1872.

100 See Robert J. Breckinridge, *The Knowledge of God, Subjectively considered. Being the Second Part of Theology considered as a Science of Positive Truth, both Inductive and Deductive.* New York and Louisville, 1859, pp. 178-202.

101 See J. L. Girardeau's *Discussions of Theological Questions.* Although the material found in Webb's monograph dates back to lectures he delivered at Louisville Theological Seminary, Kentucky, it was not published until 1947, nearly 30 years after his death.

Theology he lists adoption as a blessing of grace, but curtails his exposition to but an enumeration of adoption's privileges.[102]

Finally, we must briefly mention the fact that the Candlish/Crawford debate ran contemporaneously with a parallel bifurcation between two Roman Catholic theologians: Matthias Joseph Scheeben (1835-88) and Theodore Granderath (1839-1902). 'Never before in the history of Roman Catholic theology,' writes Edwin Palmer, 'was there such an extensive discussion of the formal cause of adoption as in the Granderath-Scheeben debate.'[103] He wisely adds that a better knowledge of Scheeben's theory would help inform and dialectically challenge the Reformed understanding of adoption.

So much, then, for the theological history of adoption! As we shall explain in the next article, its abrupt ending reflects the fact that the advent of liberal theology, with its espousal of a universal Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, did, surprisingly, as little justice to adoption as had the prior conservative preoccupation with legal categories. What further developments the twentieth century witnessed were largely a repetition of the Methodist and Brethren emphasis on filial and familial devotion, as became manifest in the Charismatic movement. Even there, however, the focus on the Father could not be guaranteed. By the later twentieth century Tom Smail, a former leader of the movement, was lamenting its immature self-absorption:

> A renewal in danger of being dominated by the desire of Christians to have their felt spiritual, emotional or physical needs satisfied, or by the pursuit of charismatic power, needs to be converted from its own self-concern to a new obedience to the universal purpose and will of the Father. The renewal will find an expanding significance and life, not within its own internal evolution, but only as it seeks to see what the Father is doing.[104]

While germane to the Charismatic movement, Smail's comments are relevant for us all. We need neither a self-reliance, nor a Jesuology tantamount to the practical christomonism that marks too many Christian lives, but a robust trinitariansim that, in Smail's words, 'starts not with the cross of Jesus or with the gift of the Spirit, but with the Father who so

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[102] John L. Dagg, *A Manual of Theology*, first published 1857 (Harrisonburg, VA, 1982), pp. 274-7.

[103] E. H. Palmer, *Scheeben's Doctrine of Divine Adoption* (Kampen, 1953), p. xi.

[104] Smail, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

loved the world that he gave his Son in his Spirit'.[105] Of course, many would affirm the same. But if this is so self-evident then why do the insights of the foregoing theologians continue to languish in the archives of the church, their potential contribution to the development of soteriology remaining untapped to this day? The time has surely come for the discussion to move on from the documentation of the neglect of adoption to the intentional appropriation of the resources required to integrate finally the doctrine of adoption into the everyday theology of the church.

[105] *Ibid.*, 20.