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SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD
An Account of a Systematic Theology of Adoption

By

Michael BRAEUTIGAM, BA, Dipl.-Psych.

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master in Theology
2008

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Declaration

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Michael BRAEUTIGAM (*candidate*)

ABSTRACT

Title of the Document: SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD
An Account of a Systematic Theology of Adoption

Name of the Candidate: Michael BRAEUTIGAM, BA, Dipl.-Psych.

Directed By: Principal Professor Donald Macleod, Department
of Systematic Theology, Free Church College

The doctrine of adoption has received little attention throughout the history of theology. This paper serves as a contribution towards a systematisation of the reformed doctrine of adoption. The cause of adoption is seen as rooted in the Trinitarian agency: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit co-act in redemptive adoption. In analysing “adoption” in the New Testament (in the Synoptics and in the writings of the apostles John and Paul), we are led to a threefold interpretation regarding its effects. That is, adoption is embedded in a conceptual network, consisting of judicial notions (Roman adoption metaphor), transformational aspects (regeneration, new birth), and an eschatological prospect. The doctrine of adoption is a comprehensive doctrine, which is demonstrated by its global presence within the *ordo salutis*. Finally, redemptive adoption is always to the glory of God.

Key words: adoption, *huiiothesia*, sonship¹, fatherhood, Trinity, Synoptics, John, Paul.

¹ The terms „sonship“, „son(s)“, “man”/“men” etc. in this thesis also stand as representatives of females.

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Michael Bracutigam

Edinburgh, January 2008

Abbreviations

ASV	American Standard Version
BAG	A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>JE</i>	<i>The Jewish Encyclopedia</i>
<i>DPL</i>	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
KJV	King James Version
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
NIV	New International Version
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>

Overview

“What is (the doctrine of) adoption?” The following chapters will show that the answers are perhaps not as straightforward as might be expected. The doctrine of adoption presents itself as a complex, transcendent, comprehensive and fundamental doctrine. Still, as a short survey of the history of the doctrine of adoption will show, adoption has been widely ignored in the history of theology. In order to approach redemptive adoption accurately, we will begin by reflecting on the eternal fatherhood of God and examine the sense in which the relationship between God, the Father and his Son Jesus Christ is unique. In contrast to his eternal fatherhood, stands God’s universal fatherhood. In the next chapter we will discuss Theocratic adoption. An understanding of God’s relationship to Old Testament Israel is necessary for a proper understanding of redemptive adoption in the New Testament. Following this, we turn to the main topic, that is, redemptive adoption in the New Testament. The basis is laid by an examination of adoption in the Synoptics, Paul, and John. The Synoptics provide illuminative information about how Jesus reveals God’s fatherhood, and mediates sonship. We will discover that Jesus clearly spoke of certain rights and privileges that God’s children enjoy now, and especially in eternity. Going on to Paul’s teaching about adoption, we will provide a thorough examination of the meaning and background of the adoption metaphor (*υιοθεσία, huiothesia*). Further observations will reveal how Paul relates re-

demptive adoption to God's predestination, the Holy Spirit, and the future glorification of the sons and daughters of God. Though there are some overlaps, the Apostle John's conception of adoption is essentially different from Paul's approach. In contrast to Paul's mainly judicial notion, John focuses on the transformational side of adoption. With a thorough understanding of adoption and sonship as presented in the New Testament, we are able to construct a systematic approach.

First, we consider the root and cause of adoption, which can be completely attributed to the work of the Trinity. A detailed observation will demonstrate the different, yet interwoven acts of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Secondly, in systematising the effects of the *opera Dei* we are able to distil transformational, judicial and eschatological components. With this conceptualisation in mind, it is also feasible to organise a comprehensible doctrine of adoption in the *ordo salutis*. As adoption is essentially to the glory of God, we close with an examination of how redemptive adoption can be attributed to the glory of God.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Qualities of the doctrine of adoption

Adoption is an act of God's free grace, by which we are received into the number and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.²

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 34

One could define the biblical doctrine of adoption like this: "Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby, for the sake of Christ, he formally translates the regenerate from the family of Satan into his own, and legally confirms them in all the rights, immunities and privileges of his children."³ Though it is possible to condense it in one single sentence, the doctrine is, technically, difficult to capture. The doctrine of redemptive adoption is a multi-faceted, transcendent, comprehensive, and fundamental doctrine.

The doctrine is complex and multi-faceted. For example, scholars debate whether to interpret Paul's adoption metaphor against a Greco-Roman or/and Jewish background. Another factor that contributes to its inherent complexity is that the doctrine has to be observed in the light of the Trinity. Only a Trinitarian approach does justice to the many different facets of adoption.

² Westminster Assembly. *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English*, 81.

³ John L. Girardeau, *Discussions of Theological Questions*, 486.

From our human perspective, the doctrine of adoption presents itself as a transcendent doctrine. "What sonship implies it is impossible for us adequately to conceive"⁴, notes Thornwell. Thornwell is right: how can one fully understand God's course of action, who, by his grace, transforms a sinner and transports him from an evil community into the family of the Creator of the universe and equips him with divine rights and privileges? The dogma transcends our human capacities of understanding and perception. The sheer fact that an infinite God declares finite beings to be his beloved children is mind-boggling. There exists no cognitive component in the human mind that could apprehend the doctrine to its full extent. Everything is limited to concepts behind words and metaphors (like Paul's adoption metaphor) and the proper, underlying reality will not be revealed until the advent of Christ. Furthermore, the doctrine surpasses present human emotional abilities insofar as any emotional/physiological reaction in face of this truth will remain inappropriate. The doctrine itself is transcendent, yet human beings, imbued with sin, are not as joyful, thankful, and happy as they should in the light of such a stunning and awe-inspiring doctrine. The doctrine remains transcendent, that is, we can have only rudimentary knowledge about the subject and must wait for the full revelation in the *eschaton*.

"Adoption" is a comprehensive doctrine, characterised by a retrospective and prospective dimension. It is retrospective, as adoption is based on God's eternal decree before the creation of the world (Eph 1.4-5; 1 Cor 2.7); prospective, being directed to the glorification of his sons and daughters in the

⁴ James H. Thornwell, *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, 264.

eschaton (Phil 3.21). Hence, the doctrine of adoption touches the multiple layers of the *ordo salutis*, beginning with effectual calling and aiming towards glorification. Moreover, the doctrine as perhaps no other redemptive concept, incorporates transformational and judicial as well as eschatological dimensions.

The doctrine is fundamental. Fundamental in that it points to the Christian's core identity as a newborn child, adopted by divine agency and created in God's image. "What is a Christian?" asks James Packer and answers: "The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God for his Father."⁵ A Christian is privileged not only to call, but actually to have God, the Creator of the universe, as his Father. The fusing of Creator and creature as Father and son was always a central goal of God's redemptive work. Adoption is fundamental, as Sinclair B. Ferguson adds: "Our sonship to God is the apex of creation and the goal of redemption."⁶

Despite the complexity of the doctrine we must never lose sight of our venture's importance. For the doctrine of adoption is not *a* truth – it is *the* glorious truth about an infinite and almighty God who decided before the foundation of the world to appoint finite and impotent creatures to be his children. Thus, the doctrine of adoption represents the zenith of God's grace towards hell-deserving sinners. It is more than just a judicial metaphor – it is a powerful reality. In our endeavour, we must approach the topic humbly, but nonethe-

⁵ James I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 225.

⁶ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, 6.

less rigorously and with resolve, involving all our human capacities, as Karl Barth suggests: The Christian has to strive for the “highest knowledge, but because it is the highest, it is a knowledge which claims not only his eye and intellect, but the whole man.”⁷

Finally, adoption is rooted in God’s great love. However, God’s love does not cling to us in the sense that we are lovable, or love-deserving. On the contrary, we human beings are sinners and therefore unlovable. God’s love is rooted in himself. In commenting on Deuteronomy 8.7-8, Jonathan Edwards explains: “God speaks of his love to the children of Israel in the wilderness, as though his love were for love’s sake, and his goodness were its own end and motive.”⁸ In a word, when God loves he loves first and foremost for his own sake. Accordingly, we could say: when God adopts out of his own love, he adopts for his own sake. Adoption is primarily for God and not for the creature. The creature is merely the recipient, who is acted upon. God is the great actor and his gracious act of adoption serves mainly to magnify his glory. For everything God does, is about displaying and demonstrating his own glory, as Edwards says: “For it appears, that all that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God’s works, is included in that one phrase, the glory of God.”⁹ God’s glory is the vanishing point of all that he does. Consequently, adoption exists to magnify the glory of God’s grace. Paul underlines this real-

⁷ Karl Barth, *CD III*, 244.

⁸ Jonathan Edwards, quoted in John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory. Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards*, 224.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 242.

ity as he writes in his letter to the Ephesians that God “predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, ... ⁶ *to the praise of his glorious grace*” (Eph 1.5-6, emphasis added).¹⁰ Therefore, when God, out of his great love, adopts rebellious sinners into his household, it most clearly displays the glory of his tremendous grace. The ultimate goal of adoption is to exhibit the grace of the glory of God. We are the beneficiaries and God gets the glory. We get the adoption and God gets the praise. For that reason, it is of major importance that we keep God’s glory always at the forefront of our considerations. Adoption is not mainly about creatures but about the Creator and the greatness of the glory of his grace.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from: *The Holy Bible; English Standard Version*. 2001. Crossway Bibles (Good News Publishers).

1.2 Neglect of the doctrine

He [the Christian] is the one man who will always be the most surprised, the most affected, the most apprehensive and the most joyful in the face of events. He will not be like an ant which has foreseen everything in advance, but like a child in a forest, or on Christmas Eve... And all this because he has an *understanding* with the source from which everything derives, from which directly or indirectly everything happens to him; the *understanding* of the creature with its Creator, which is, for him, that of the child with its father.¹¹

Karl Barth

Taking our foregoing observations as a basis, it is not surprising that scholars regard adoption as an immensely important doctrine. "Adoption is one of the chief constituent doctrines of the New Testament Theology. The *υιοθεσία* of the believer is the climax of the redemptive process in its objective aspect"¹², states Whaling at the beginning of the 20th century, and adds that the doctrine of adoption is "the supreme illustration of grace, and the highest

¹¹ Karl Barth, *CD III*, 3, 242-243.

¹² Thornton Whaling, "Adoption", 223.

reach of glory for the redeemed.”¹³ Similarly, James I. Packer concludes in *Knowing God*: “you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one’s holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father.”¹⁴ Wolfhart Pannenberg writes in his *Systematic Theology*: “Being God’s children is thus of the essence of the Christian life.”¹⁵ Indeed, as we have seen earlier, the doctrine of adoption is of major importance, being of fundamental and comprehensive quality. Adoption is truly “the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification”¹⁶, as Packer notes. The adoption as sons and daughters of God is the Christian’s “fountain privilege”¹⁷, as John Owen calls it.

Judging by the extraordinary extent to which the doctrine is appreciated one might conclude that systematic theologians would dedicate much of their effort to the doctrine of adoption. One could definitely expect a long history of research about the essence of adoption. Yet, astonishingly, judged against its inherent importance, the doctrine has not, to this day, received the attention it deserves.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ James I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 226.

¹⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, 212.

¹⁶ James I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 232.

¹⁷ John Owen, quoted in James I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 241.

It is difficult to comprehend why the doctrine – despite its indubitable centrality and importance – has received so little attention until now.¹⁸ In other words, the *status quo* of the doctrine could be described as a “paradox of neglect.” About 60 years ago, Robert Webb complained that the doctrine of adoption “has received but slender treatment at the hands of theologians. It has been handled with a meagreness entirely out of proportion of its intrinsic importance.”¹⁹ Little has changed since then – James I. Packer joins Webb’s complaint in his diagnosis: “It is a strange fact that the truth of adoption has been little regarded in Christian history.”²⁰ Indeed, a *prima facie* look at the theological history of adoption shows a clear disregard for the topic (see following chapter). However, not only in the history of doctrine is the neglect evident, but also in the history of creeds and confessions. A praiseworthy exception is the thoughtful treatment in the *Westminster Catechism of Faith*. As Tim Trummer observes in his reviews of the theological history of adoption, it is within the Reformed tradition that the doctrine has best been upheld.²¹

Overall, the importance of the doctrine of adoption “has been to a large extent overlooked, its place in a distinct and independent treatment of the covenant of grace has been refused.”²² Thus, in our evaluation we follow

¹⁸ Compare for an overview: Douglas F. Kelly, “Adoption: An Underdeveloped Heritage of the Westminster Standards.”

¹⁹ Robert A. Webb, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*, 17.

²⁰ James I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 258

²¹ Tim J. R. Trummer, “The Theological History of Adoption I: An Account”, 10.

²² John L. Girardeau, *Discussions of Theological Questions*, 429.

Trumper, who recently argued that “a thoroughgoing theology of adoption is long overdue.”²³ With the present paper we take up this challenge, acknowledging that apart from being a theological necessity, there are social and pastoral reasons which ought to stimulate further systematic research into the doctrine of adoption.

²³ Tim J. R. Trumper, “The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation II: The Adoption Metaphor in Theological Usage”, 115.

1.3 The doctrine of adoption in theological history

Adoption ..., one of the most underrated doctrines of Holy Scripture.²⁴

Tim J. R. Trumper

A closer look at the history of the doctrine of adoption proves to be disappointing. James Green summarises theological research about the doctrine like this: “The doctrine of adoption has received scant recognition in theological discussions and pulpit dissertations. Some great treatises omit it altogether, others devote to it a few remarks, while scarcely any of them articulates it as a separate head in divinity.”²⁵ Due to the limited space we have to restrict our considerations to a short summary of the theological history of adoption. A more detailed treatment can be found in Tim Trumper’s contributions.²⁶

In the early centuries, subjects like “deity” and “eternal sonship” were of primary interest, rather than adoptive sonship. The early creeds do not

²⁴ Tim J. R. Trumper, “The Theological History of Adoption I: An Account”, 4.

²⁵ James Green, quoted in Angus Stewart, “Adoption” (no page reference in original document).

²⁶ See Tim J. R. Trumper, “The Theological History of Adoption I: An Account” and “The Theological History of Adoption II: A Rationale.”

speak explicitly about adoption and the Latin and Greek church fathers did not, in general, view adoption as a prominent theme.²⁷

During the Middle Ages there was no significant development in the doctrine of adoption, but things changed with the arrival of the Reformation. With Luther, the foundational doctrine of justification by faith was rediscovered, though he did not stress adoption as a distinct feature. Calvin emphasised adoption only enigmatically, which led Robert Webb to jump over-hastily to the conclusion that Calvin “makes no allusion whatever to adoption.”²⁸ This is certainly not the case. Although Calvin does not have a distinct chapter about adoption in his *Institutes*, the doctrine shines through in several places in his writings²⁹ (e.g. Calvin’s commentary on 2 Cor 1.20, and his preamble to Paul’s letter to the Ephesians). As a matter of fact, adoption is so important for Calvin that he tends to equate adoption with salvation – this drives Trumper even to call Calvin “the theologian of adoption.”³⁰ “The adoption of believers is at the heart of John Calvin’s understanding of salvation”³¹, notes Griffith, and Wilterdink concludes that “for Calvin, adoption into the family of God is

²⁷ For a more detailed exposition compare Tim J. R. Trumper’s outline in “The Theological History of Adoption I: An Account”, 13-17.

²⁸ Robert A. Webb, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*, 16.

²⁹ See Nigel Westhead, “Adoption in the Thought of John Calvin.”

³⁰ Tim J. R. Trumper, “A Fresh Exposition of Adoption: II. Some Implications”, 196.

³¹ Howard Griffith, “‘The First Title of the Spirit’: Adoption in Calvin’s Soteriology”, 135.

synonymous with salvation.”³² Beside Calvin, no other Reformer attached equal importance to the doctrine of adoption. The one exception is Francis Turretin who mentions adoption in his writings, yet unfortunately as being subsumed under justification.³³ His approach is nonetheless noteworthy, for his emphasis on adoption prevented the topic from falling into complete oblivion. Similarly, the Catholic tradition tends to combine adoption and justification: The Council of Trent defines justification as the “translation from that condition in which man is born as the son of the first Adam into the state of grace and adoption among the children of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ our Savior.”³⁴ Until today, the Catholic dogma does not treat adoption as a subject of separate importance.

The Puritans in England likewise neglected the doctrine of adoption. Trumper notes that “too few of the Puritans dealt with the doctrine as a distinct theological *locus*.”³⁵ Commendable exceptions are Thomas Goodwin and John Owen (e.g. in his *Communion with God*³⁶). William Ames has a section on adoption in his *Marrow of Sacred Divinity*.³⁷ It is interesting then, that the

³² Garret Wilterdink, quoted in Tim J. R. Trumper, “The Theological History of Adoption I: An Account”, 19.

³³ See Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol. 2, 666-669.

³⁴ Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 250.

³⁵ Tim J. R. Trumper, “The Theological History of Adoption I: An Account”, 23.

³⁶ John Owen, *Communion with God*.

³⁷ William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity*.

framers of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (12) produced the most elaborate treatment of adoption, devoting a whole chapter to the topic:

“Participation in the grace of adoption is conferred by God on all the justified for the sake of his only Son, Jesus Christ. By this act they are numbered with and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God. They have his name put upon them, receive the spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, and are enabled to cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ They are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by God, as by a father. Yet they are never cast off, for they have been sealed for the day of redemption, and so inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation.”³⁸

This chapter in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* influenced at least two other creeds, namely the *Savoy Declaration* (1658) and the *Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689), who copied *verbatim* from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, as Trumper detected.³⁹ The Scottish tradition distinguishes itself in Thomas Boston, who regards adoption as a benefit of effectual calling.⁴⁰

³⁸ Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English*, 30.

³⁹ Tim J. R. Trumper, “The Theological History of Adoption I: An Account”.

⁴⁰ Thomas Boston, *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston*, Vol. 1, 612-642.

During the latter part of the 18th century, Baptist theologian John Gill⁴¹ wrote a pioneering chapter about adoption in his *Body of Divinity*. In the ensuing 19th century, a debate emerged between Robert Candlish and fellow Calvinist Thomas Crawford about the fatherhood of God. This controversy encouraged subsequent theologians to tackle the semantic net of fatherhood/adoption as well.⁴² Worth mentioning are Free-churchmen John Kennedy⁴³ and Principal Robert Rainy.⁴⁴ At the dawn of the 20th century, Methodist John Scott Lidgett⁴⁵ and Southern Presbyterian John L. Girardeau published their treatments of adoption. Girardeau devotes an innovative and detailed chapter to adoption in his *Discussions of Theological Questions*.⁴⁶ The rise of Liberal theology brought an abrupt end to the growing plant of the

⁴¹ The structure and quality of Gill's treatise gives rise to the supposition that it may have served as a blueprint for following generations of theologians: John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity; or, A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, Vol. 2, 820-830.

⁴² Except for representatives of Princeton Theology, who proved to be quite unaffected by the rising interest in the fatherhood of God. The marginality of the doctrine's importance is *inter alia* reflected by Charles Hodge who devoted only a few paragraphs to adoption in his *Systematic Theology* (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, 164-165).

⁴³ John Kennedy, *Man's Relations to God - Traced in the Light of the present Truth*.

⁴⁴ Robert Rainy, "The Spirit of Adoption".

⁴⁵ John S. Lidgett, *The Fatherhood of God In Christian Truth and Life*.

⁴⁶ John L. Girardeau, *Discussions of Theological Questions*, 428-521.

“doctrine of adoption.” Nevertheless, Thornton Whaling published a treatise⁴⁷ worth mentioning, while Robert A. Webb⁴⁸ presented a “somewhat disappointing”⁴⁹ work on *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*. Around the same time in Germany, Willi Twisselmann wrote a short but important monograph about the *Gotteskindschaft* in the New Testament.⁵⁰

In the 1950s, John Murray⁵¹ rediscovered adoption as an essential component in the *ordo salutis*. About 20 years later, James I. Packer included a chapter about the “Sons of God” in his classic, *Knowing God*.⁵² In the last decades, different approaches to the subject by von Allmen⁵³, Ferguson⁵⁴ (a

⁴⁷ Thornton Whaling, “Adoption”.

⁴⁸ Robert A. Webb, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*.

⁴⁹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, “The Reformed Doctrine of Sonship”, in N. M. de S. Cameron and S. B. Ferguson, eds., *Pulpit & People - Essays in honour of William Still on his 75th birthday*, 83.

⁵⁰ Willi Twisselmann, *Die Gotteskindschaft der Christen nach dem Neuen Testament*.

⁵¹ John Murray, *Redemption - accomplished and applied*, 132-140.

⁵² James I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 225-260.

⁵³ Daniel von Allmen, *La Famille de Dieu - La Symbolique Familiale dans le Paulisme*.

⁵⁴ Sinclair B. Ferguson, “The Reformed Doctrine of Sonship”, in N. M. de S. Cameron and S. B. Ferguson, eds., *Pulpit & People - Essays in honour of William Still on his 75th birthday*.

classic approach in a Calvinistic tradition), and Scott⁵⁵, showed growing interest in the doctrine. Most recently, Tim Trummer provided a careful analysis of the theological history of adoption⁵⁶ and gave an overview of the adoption metaphor.⁵⁷ Robert Peterson presents a more popular approach to the topic.⁵⁸ Recently, Trevor Burke published a thorough examination of the Pauline adoption metaphor.⁵⁹ However, a full recovery of the doctrine, especially a satisfactory systematic conception, is still a long way off.

To conclude, the doctrine of adoption suffered a general neglect throughout past centuries, receiving almost no official creedal recognition. At best, adoption was seen as an adjunct to justification (the “positive side” of justification). An exception to these traditional interpretations is John Calvin, for whom adoption both underpins and overarches his theology. Judging by our short survey, the doctrine was mainly upheld by the Reformed community; to quote Trummer: “adoption is mainly, but not exclusively, a Reformed dis-

⁵⁵ James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God - An exegetical investigation into the background of huiothesia in the Pauline corpus*.

⁵⁶ Tim J. R. Trummer, “The Theological History of Adoption I: An Account” and “The Theological History of Adoption II: A Rationale”. See also his articles: “A Fresh Exposition of Adoption: I. An Outline” and “A Fresh Exposition of Adoption: II. Some Implications”.

⁵⁷ Tim J. R. Trummer, “The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation II: The Adoption Metaphor in Theological Usage”.

⁵⁸ Robert A. Peterson, *Adopted by God - from wayward sinners to cherished children*.

⁵⁹ Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family. Exploring a Pauline metaphor*.

tinctive.”⁶⁰ Some notable Reformed theologians of the 19th and 20th century brought the doctrine some steps forward but nevertheless, “adoption” is a forgotten doctrine that needs urgent recovery.

⁶⁰ Tim J. R. Trumper, “The Theological History of Adoption I: An Account”, 10.

1.4 The eternal fatherhood of God

Why is He [Christ] called God's only begotten Son, since we also are the children of God? Because Christ alone is the eternal natural Son of God; but we are children of God by adoption through grace for his sake.⁶¹

Heidelberg Catechism

Jesus Christ is the *logos* (λόγος, John 1.1), the image of God (2 Cor 4.4) and the effulgence of God's glory (Heb 1.3). The *logos* is also the Son, in Paul's terminology, the *Huios Theou* (Υἱὸς Θεοῦ, Rom 5.10; 8.3,32; 1 Cor 15.24-28; Gal 4.4).⁶² Christ is also described as the only-begotten Son of God, the *monogenēs* (μονογενής)⁶³ as John expresses it (John 1.14,18; 3.16,18; 1 John 4.9). Accordingly, God is Father *essentialiter*, that is, for God being Father is *essentia Dei*. The *logos* was with God from the beginning (John 1.2), which leads to the conclusion that God is Father eternal, and Jesus is Son from eternity. The eternal fatherhood of God implies the eternal sonship of Christ.

⁶¹ Alexander Smellie, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, 25.

⁶² Compare for an introduction Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 71-107.

⁶³ For a discussion, see Donald Macleod, *Jesus is Lord - Christology yesterday and today*, 11-12.

As a matter of fact, the translation of the term *monogenēs theos* as “the only begotten Son” is liable to misunderstanding. For “to beget” implies that something/someone has a beginning, or a cause. This wrong interpretative path was walked by Arius who held that Christ was conceived (begotten) by God in the sense of bringing into existence someone who was non-existent before. Adoptionism, as a derivative of Arianism, further confirmed this wrong route in speaking of Christ as an ordinary human being until God adopted him at his baptism.

The biblical *monogenēs*, often translated as “only-begotten”, is not necessarily about having a beginning, or having been caused, produced, created, originated, or the like. Therefore, the *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed* declared in a profound way that Christ was begotten, yet not created: “Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds [God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made.”⁶⁴ This truth needs to be made crystal clear in order to avoid Arian or adoptionist misunderstandings. The Son Jesus Christ is from eternity un-created, as Donald Macleod emphasises: “The Son is the Logos and the Logos has no origin. In the beginning, he was already in being. He is the eternal Son... This is probably as far as we can go... It is doubtful whether begotten adds anything to Son, apart from laying down that he is Son in a unique way.”⁶⁵ Jesus is clearly “Son, not by creation, or adoption, or incarnation, or office; but by nature; the true, proper, co-equal, co-essential, and co-eternal Son of the Father,

⁶⁴ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of the Greek and Latin Churches*, 58.

⁶⁵ Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 73.

because from eternity possessing the same nature, and the same plenitude of Divine perfection with himself”⁶⁶, writes Miller in his *Letters on the Eternal Sonship of Christ*. And Candlish rightly observes that the “paternal relation ... is natural, necessary, and eternal. It is not constituted by any creative act, or any sovereign volition or fiat or will.”⁶⁷ Christ was always the Son of God and God was always the Father of his Son Jesus Christ. We cannot conceive of the Son as once non-existent and now existent/begotten – rather, we should regard Christ as once being in glory, then in weakness and again exalted in glory, as Macleod suggests:

The contrast is not between a time when he was Son and a time when he was not Son, but between a time when he was Son in weakness and a time when he became Son with power. In his earthly life, he was the Son humiliated: to all outward appearance a mere man, homeless and friendless, without power or influence. Now he is transfigured, regnant and pre-eminent: The resurrection marks not his adoption but his investiture.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Samuel Miller, *Letters on the Eternal Sonship of Christ: Addressed to The Rev. Professor Stuart, of Andover*, 38.

⁶⁷ Robert S. Candlish, *Fatherhood of God - Being the first course of the Cunningham Lectures*, 69.

⁶⁸ Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 92.

Furthermore, *monogenēs* implies *Einzigartigkeit* (uniqueness). There are no equal sisters or brothers of Christ – Christ is in this sense God’s “one-of-a-kind Son”, an “only-child.”⁶⁹

It is also noteworthy that the relationship between the Father and Jesus Christ is in its essence unique. The *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed* speaks of Christ as “being of one substance [essence] with the Father.”⁷⁰ What does this *homoousion* (of one being) with the Father imply? Jenson shows that we can exclude two possible, yet wrong meanings. According to Jenson, *homoousion* neither indicates that God and Christ are exactly the same, nor does it mean that there are two Gods. He goes on to explain:

That the Father and the Son are *homoousios* means that precisely the relation of the Son to the Father belongs both to what it means to be God and to the fact of there being God. The Son is indeed the image of the Father, but his deity is not an image of the Father’s deity but the same deity. That there is God the Son is ‘proper to’ the facts both of the Father’s being the Father and of his being God.⁷¹

God’s relation to Jesus as a Father is unique, that is, the relationship is “immanent, eternal and exclusive.”⁷² Macleod describes Jesus’ uniqueness as God’s Son in the following terms: Jesus “is an object of special love, he is the Father’s equal, he is the Father’s likeness and he is an eternal, not an adopted

⁶⁹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, 42.

⁷⁰ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of the Greek and Latin Churches*, 58.

⁷¹ Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune God, Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 103.

⁷² John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 2, 223.

Son.”⁷³ From the uniqueness of this relationship we may deduce that a person’s relation to God – unregenerate or regenerate – is necessarily different in quality and essence. Eternal generation is essentially different from creation and redemptive adoption. Though the adopted child may now, and especially in the *eschaton*, share in the Trinity, it will nevertheless never be on the same level with Christ. God sustains a unique relationship to his only-begotten Son. This relation is different from his relation to the Holy Spirit, to angels and humans.

To summarise, God is Christ’s eternal Father and Christ is from eternity his only-begotten Son, Christ is “begotten by the Father before all ages (*ante secula a patre genitus*)”, as Calvin calls it.⁷⁴ There is no notion of origination implied, Christ is “a pre-existent, uncreated Being.”⁷⁵ Christ is begotten from the essence of the Father. He is *homoousios*, i.e., of one being with God, he is *holos theou* (Athanasius). Father and Son are one, equal in status and unique in their affections towards each other. The infinite, eternal, unchangeable, wise, powerful, holy, just, good and true Father expresses himself perfectly in his image, the Son, who is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, wise, powerful, holy, just, good and true. God reveals himself fully in Christ, as Macleod notes: “In Christ, we see God’s very nature. Christ is God’s definition and ex-

⁷³ Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 74.

⁷⁴ John Calvin, quoted in Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity - In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, 262.

⁷⁵ Donald Macleod, *Shared Life - The Trinity and the Fellowship of God's people*, 23.

planation of himself, so that we may read off from Jesus the deepest truths about deity itself.”⁷⁶ The relationship itself is unparalleled. God is not Christ’s Father like a human father is the father of his child: “The relation between Jesus the Son and God the Father is unique. It is not to be understood on the pattern of human fatherhood”⁷⁷, notes Letham. An individual’s relation to God is essentially different from God’s relation to his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

⁷⁶ Donald Macleod, *Jesus is Lord - Christology yesterday and today*, 39.

⁷⁷ Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity - In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*,

1.5 The universal fatherhood of God

For though all mankind, as created in the image of God, and largely partaking of His providential goodness, may be with propriety regarded as His children, yet, as the consequence of the Fall, they have been alienated from Him.⁷⁸

Thomas Crawford

Friedrich Schiller's famous *Freude schöner Götterfunken (Ode to Joy)*, set to music by Beethoven (Symphony No. 9), emphasised in best Enlightenment tradition the universal brotherhood of man and the universal fatherhood of God: "Freude, schöner Götterfunken, Tochter aus Elysium! ... Alle Menschen werden Brüder, wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt... Brüder, überm Sternenzelt muß ein lieber Vater wohnen!"⁷⁹ Was Schiller correct? Is God truly mankind's Father – and mankind God's child? In order to answer that question we must go back to the beginning of the human race.

⁷⁸ Thomas J. Crawford, *The Fatherhood of God*, 140.

⁷⁹ "Joy, beautiful spark of Gods, Daughter of Elysium... All men shall become brothers Where Thy gentle wing abides... Brothers! Above the starry canopy A loving father must dwell."

In the New Testament, Luke clearly ascribes sonship to Adam. We read in Christ's genealogy: "the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3.38). The first human beings were truly children of God. Early Greek Fathers (e.g. Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria) even held that Adam and Eve were by nature literally children and became adults only through the fall.⁸⁰ As this is quite bizarre and actually irrelevant for our purposes, we refer to Salvesen, who deals with this subject in more detail.⁸¹ Returning to Adam, we can record that, although he was a true son of God, God's relation as Father to him was different from his relation to his Son Jesus Christ. As was noted above, Jesus Christ is God's Son in an exclusive sense (as the only-begotten), whereas Adam was God's son only in a creative, or "figurative sense", as Kidd calls it.⁸² Adam was created, caused, had a beginning, whereas Jesus is un-originate, *non factus, nec creatus: sed genitus*, as expressed in the *Athanasian Creed*.⁸³ While it is clear from Scripture, that Adam was indeed a son of God, the striking question arises: Did God's relationship as a Father to Adam cease when Adam fell? In other words, is post-Edenic Adam, fallen man still a son of God? Or, to put it the other way round: Is God (still) the universal Father of the human race?

⁸⁰ Alison Salvesen, "Without Shame or Desire: The Pronouncements of Jesus on Children and the Kingdom, and Early Syriac Attitudes to Childhood", 309.

⁸¹ Alison Salvesen, "Without Shame or Desire: The Pronouncements of Jesus on Children and the Kingdom, and Early Syriac Attitudes to Childhood".

⁸² James Kidd, *A Dissertation of the Eternal Sonship of Christ*, 227.

⁸³ See Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of the Greek and Latin Churches*, 67.

Before we seek further light on this issue, we need to make clear that the concept of God's universal fatherhood is "explosive material." John Murray warns us: "Nowhere is God expressly called the Father of all men. Hence the concept of universal fatherhood, if used at all, must be employed with great caution."⁸⁴ This should be borne in mind.

Murray probably gave this warning out of disappointment with Liberal theology. The idea of God's universal fatherhood was distorted in the hands of Liberal theologians. The key notion of Liberal theology, represented by Adolf von Harnack, was that Christ did not preach himself, but rather a universal fatherhood. Von Harnack insisted that all people are God's children. Every human being is universally included in the family of God. In *Das Wesen Des Christentums*, von Harnack distilled the essence of Christianity into three principles: the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the infinite value of the human soul. He notes: "Unmittelbar und deutlich lässt sich für unser heutiges Vorstellen und Empfinden die Predigt Christi in dem Kreise der Gedanken erfassen, der durch Gott den Vater und durch die Verkündigung vom unendlichen Wert der Menschenseele bezeichnet ist."⁸⁵ Obviously, the corollary is that man only needs to wake up and acknowledge that he has al-

⁸⁴ John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 2, 224-5.

⁸⁵ "Directly and plainly for our imagery and feeling has the preaching of Christ to be understood as characterised by God, the Father and the announcement of the infinite worth of the human soul" (Adolf von Harnack, *Das Wesen Des Christentums*, author's translation, 47).

ways been a child of God. This universalistic distortion is the vexed part of von Harnack's conception: Von Harnack preaches universal salvation and completely neglects the possibility of a divine judgement. Dietrich Bonhoeffer rightly called this universal approach *billige Gnade* (cheap grace).⁸⁶ We reject these liberal excesses strongly and realise that for our venture von Harnack is of no help, blurring rather than clarifying the issue. Our principal question remains unanswered, namely, whether natural, unregenerate individuals are still God's children or not.

Within the orthodox community in the 1860s, this question became the centre of attention. The traditional reformed view was represented by Thomas Crawford, Professor of the University of Edinburgh. He held that human beings are still God's children in the sense that they, though distorted by the fall, derive their existence from him, are created after his likeness, and largely partake of his providential care.⁸⁷ Crawford notes that "God, as the primary source of our being, is in the truest and highest sense our Father."⁸⁸ Notwithstanding their depravity, continues Crawford, "men have not wholly lost that semblance of the image of God by virtue of which they may be regarded as His offspring. They are still children of God, though degenerate and apostate children."⁸⁹ In this respect, Crawford was happy to speak about a relationship between God as Father and his human children. An opposing opinion was

⁸⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, 1.

⁸⁷ Thomas J. Crawford, *The Fatherhood of God*, 10.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

taken by the Free Churchman, Robert Candlish, Principal of New College at the same time. Candlish maintained that mankind's original standing before God was not one of true sonship: "He has no filial standing; no filial rights or claims. He is simply a creature and a subject", writes Candlish.⁹⁰ He was not willing to label the relation as Crawford did, rather preferring to speak of a Creator-creature relationship in order to avoid the establishment of "somewhat too wide a fatherhood."⁹¹ Candlish's aim was to stress that sonship through divine (redemptive) adoption creates a completely new relation between man and God – it surpasses the mere restoration of the broken relationship in the fall. In this respect, we have to agree with Candlish, for the process of redemptive adoption aims at an eschatological Father-son relationship that even surpasses Eden.

Furthermore, when Candlish argues that true fatherhood of God can exist only through adoption, he is in a logical, stringent sense right because one cannot adopt a child who is already his. Moreover, if we differentiated different degrees of sonship, one could argue that in a natural sense every human being is a child of God, while, through the fall, the child is neither spiritually nor legally God's child anymore – and therefore a resumption, that is, an adoption would certainly make sense. Jonathan Edwards, for example, introduces in a sermon preached in 1744 two categories: every human being is a

⁹⁰ Robert S. Candlish, *Fatherhood of God - Being the first course of the Cunningham Lectures*, 40.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

child of God in a “natural sense”, whereas only Christians are also children in a “spiritual sense”.⁹²

In 1905, monitoring the past debates in Scotland from the other side of the Atlantic, John Girardeau endeavoured to draw a line under the arguments. Southern Presbyterian Girardeau supported Crawford’s view that by nature, mankind still is a child of God: “Sinners ... are sons in revolt – sons disinherited, excommunicated, reprobated, but still sons, under the indestructible obligation of nature to render filial obedience to God.”⁹³ What Girardeau shows is that the natural Father-child relation between God and mankind could not have been destroyed by the fall, that, after all, “the sinner is a son of God.”⁹⁴ However, adds Girardeau, in two other relations, humankind has ceased to be God’s child. First, the human race lost his spiritual life and became a child of disobedience, and secondly, mankind has ceased to be legally a child of God. That is, his disobedience “disinherited” him, God disowned and excommunicated him, and he became a child of wrath. Similarly to Girardeau, Alexander Whyte sought to distinguish several degrees of sonship. He assumes a “low” sonship, and a sonship through regeneration and resurrection.⁹⁵

⁹² Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 25, 159.

⁹³ John L. Girardeau, *Discussions of Theological Questions*, 432.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 431.

⁹⁵ Writes Whyte: “There is one degree of sonship founded on creation, and that is the lowest, as belonging unto all, both good and bad.” (Alexander Whyte, *A Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, 86).

Comparable to those conceptions is Thornton Whaling's approach. Whaling differentiated three layers of sonship, namely natural, spiritual, and legal sonship.⁹⁶ Now, Whaling's main argument is that Adam lost – through his fall – his legal and spiritual sonship but retained his natural sonship. This conceptualisation proves to be practical in order to understand the fatherhood of God and we will employ it for our further considerations.

The crux is that by nature all human beings are God's children. That is, we all owe our existence to God, as Charles Mead accentuates: "God, being the Maker and Benefactor of men, he may fitly be likened to a father, and be called the Father of all men."⁹⁷ God is the human being's universal Father in such a way that all human beings have God as their origin and source. God is to humans the author of their being, he is their progenitor. John Calvin follows this course in his commentary on Exodus: "I allow, indeed, that all the race of Adam was made in the image of God, his posterity were always reckoned, in a certain sense, to be the children of God."⁹⁸

These prerequisites do not exist in a theological vacuum but are confirmed by biblical notions. For instance, the prophet asks rhetorically: "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?" (Mal 2.10). Furthermore, Paul's argument at Mars Hill supports the notion of human being's natural

⁹⁶ Thornton Whaling, "Adoption".

⁹⁷ Charles M. Mead, "The Fatherhood of God", 600.

⁹⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the four last Books of Moses, arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, 103.

sonship: “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring’” (Acts 17.28). God is also called “the Father of spirits” (Heb 12.9), and the “Father of lights” (Jas 1.17). It is also noteworthy that in the “Parable of the Prodigal Son”, God welcomes not just a returning creature, but a returning child. Here, Jesus portrays God as the universal Father on the look-out, waiting for his wayward “natural” child to return home, in order to adopt him into his family. Furthermore, in his fascinating discussion with the woman from Samaria about basic principles of Christian worship (John 4), Jesus indicates that God is factually “the Father” in the sense that we all bear God’s image and share God’s providential care and provision. Expressed in a kind of ontological argument, one could also suppose that God is Father of all men, reflected in the “obvious analogy between his relation to men and that of a man to the children whom he has procreated”⁹⁹, as Mead suggests.

Therefore, God “may be called the Father of man in general by reason of universal creation and benevolence”¹⁰⁰, notes Thomas. In this context, it is noteworthy that God has revealed this truth to all humanity. Thus, the natural, unregenerate individual is still able to attribute his existence to God, his Father. Calvin argues that every human being has a *sensus deitatis*, which en-

⁹⁹ Charles M. Mead, “The Fatherhood of God”, 582.

¹⁰⁰ Griffith W. H. Thomas, *The Principles of Theology - An Introduction to the thirty-nine articles*, 497.

ables him also to acknowledge God as his cause.¹⁰¹ Fallen human beings definitely know that they derive from God, and they feel consequently a *sense of dependence* (“absolute, schlechthinnige Abhängigkeit”, Friedrich Schleiermacher).¹⁰²

Yet, as Adam’s descendants, human beings are born into his fallen condition. For that reason, everyone, by his very nature, is a child of the devil (John 8.44; 1 John 3.10), of disobedience (Eph 2.2), of darkness (Eph 5.8), and of wrath (Eph 2.3). Mankind is still a (natural) child of God, but the child lost every moral and spiritual likeness to God. Crawford summarises:

Sin has defaced in them the lineaments of His image, - forfeited their title to His favour, - estranged them from His fellowship, - and exposed them to His merited wrath. They cannot now be considered as His children, in the same full and precious sense of the expression in which their progenitors were so, when at first created.¹⁰³

Yet, God, through Christ, reinstalls spiritual and legal sonship through redemptive adoption, as we shall discuss later in more detail.

¹⁰¹ Calvin notes that “there exists in the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, ... being aware that there is a God, and that he is their Maker.” (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 43, I.iii.1).

¹⁰² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, 23.

¹⁰³ Thomas Crawford, *The Fatherhood of God*, 140.

Considered from a forensic angle, the human race lost through the fall its rights of legal sonship. In losing a legal standing, human beings have neither privileges nor rights before God. They have but responsibilities and duties as servants, though no inheritance, and no rights whatsoever. Therefore, if mankind's (legal and spiritual) sonship continued after the fall, there would be no need for adoption. Following Liberal theology's universalism to its logical conclusion, it turns adoption *ad absurdum* (Why adopt children who are already full sons and daughters?). The biblical truth of redemptive adoption argues against a universal (redemptive) sonship, or rather, fatherhood.

Taken together, we assume a universal fatherhood in the limited sense that human beings are, although spiritually dead and legally lost, natural sons and daughters of God with the potential to become full children through redemptive adoption. Lidgett writes in this context that, "Man's sonship is but a latent capacity marred by sin, until he receives the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."¹⁰⁴ True redemptive fatherhood is therefore enjoyed only by those children who are adopted by God. When Girardeau notes that "adoption *formalizes* the previous *real* relation of sonship"¹⁰⁵ he does not disclose the whole truth. We must go further and realise that through redemptive adoption not only the spiritual and legal aspects of sonship are restored, but that a whole new creature is formed. The spiritually dead child is raised to a new life and experiences a complete metamorphosis by receiving a new heart and spirit.

¹⁰⁴ John S. Lidgett, *The Fatherhood of God in Christian Truth and Life*, 48.

¹⁰⁵ John L. Girardeau, *Discussions of Theological Questions*, 461.

1.6 Theocratic adoption

I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold;
bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, ⁷
everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.

Isaiah 43.6-7

In the Old Testament, we can discern a twofold fatherhood of God. God is, first of all, the Father of the nation Israel, which he “adopted”. Secondly, God reveals himself as the Father of individual Israelites.

God’s fatherhood in relation to Israel is based on Theocratic adoption. That is, though Israel was not God’s son by birth, Israel becomes God’s child by means of adoption. Israel’s sonship was due to God’s sovereign choice: God chose and effectually called Israel.

As we have noted earlier, God always acts for his own glory. Such is the case in Theocratic as well as redemptive adoption. God always operates with superiority, never because of any reasons within the object he acts upon. The reason why God chose and called Israel is his love, as we read accord-

ingly in Deuteronomy: "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples,⁸ but it is because the LORD loves you" (Deut 7.7-8a). God's love is the impetus of his sovereign work of Theocratic adoption. The legal basis of this adoption is the covenant of grace. The covenant metaphor depicts the legal relationship between God as sovereign ruler and Father and his chosen people, who are protected and have obligations towards him. The direction of this electing act is worth mentioning. It was not Israel that chose God, but God that chose Israel, namely for himself: "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut 14.2).

Therefore, God has a legal claim on Israel. Israel belongs to him and Israel should render glory to God, for he created and called Israel exclusively for his own glory: "I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth,⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made" (Isa 43.6-7). The aspect of glory in this context must not be underrated. God called Israel out of Egypt for his glory and for his name's sake: "who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name" (Isa 63.12). Apparently, "God adopted Israel in order to fulfil his purpose and for a

glorious goal”¹⁰⁶, as Twisselmann notes. God acts in a sovereign way with Israel, so that the whole world might see his glory,¹⁰⁷ which is the ultimate end of all his dealings.

But God does not relate to Israel merely as a sovereign king and ruler. He introduces an intimate Father-son relationship, which is extraordinary and marks a unique event in the history of humanity. The idea of a relationship between a human being and a god/goddess has undoubtedly some prevalence in other ancient religions. For example, the Babylonians believed that their mother-goddess *Ishtar* adopted kings at their accession to the throne. In ancient Egypt, the goddess *Isis* was thought of as begetting human kings. Greek mythology considered the supreme god *Zeus* as father of human beings and other gods (Sophocles calls him: “ὁ τῶν ἀπάντων Ζεὺς πατήρ”¹⁰⁸). The notion of humans being adopted by gods/goddesses appears in the *Eleusinian Mysteries*. The hope behind such ideas always lay in the advantage of having a relationship with a god/goddess. Through such a privileged relationship, the human being was thought of as having supernatural power, in order to reign and live eternally. Even so, these relationships were not marked by personal,

¹⁰⁶ Willi Twisselmann, *Die Gotteskindschaft der Christen nach dem Neuen Testament*, author’s translation, 34.

¹⁰⁷ God makes it plain that his dealings with Pharaoh, in order to free Israel from slavery, serve the proclamation of his glory (e.g. Exod 14.4, 17-18).

¹⁰⁸ Willi Twisselmann, *Die Gotteskindschaft der Christen nach dem Neuen Testament*, 10.

intimate, mutual love. On the contrary: in both parties, only egocentric, immoral pursuits of power and immortality came to the fore. Unlike these instances, the God of the Old Testament declares that he loves Israel like a father loves his son: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos 11.1). God speaks of Israel as his firstborn son¹⁰⁹, and his favoured one (Jer 3.19). He set Israel free from slavery and carried his nation “as a father carries his son” (Deut 1.31). Consequently, Moses called the people of God “sons of the LORD your God” (Deut 14.1). Israel therefore had the incomparable privilege to call God his Father (Isa 63.16; 64.7; Mal 2.10). God’s relation to his child Israel is marked by intimacy, care, love and mercy – the pinnacle of the Old Testament is that God revealed himself as a Father to his holy nation.

Israel, as God’s adopted child, enjoyed certain privileges and responsibilities. As Israel was set apart from his pagan neighbours, he had to obey God and keep himself pure from idolatry: “You are the sons of the LORD your God. You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead” (Deut 14.1). Because of their divinely granted privileges, the Israelites were required to honour God as their Father and to love him with all their heart and with all their might and vigour (Deut 6.5; 11.5; 30.16). Love and obedience were the prerequisites of the covenant, the basis on which the covenantal sonship was upheld.

¹⁰⁹ “Israel is my firstborn son” (Exod 4.22; compare also Jer 31.9).

Unfortunately, the Israelites proved to be unfaithful, disloyal and rebellious: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me" (Isa 1.2). They did not honour God, their Father as they should: "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor?" (Mal 1.6). Instead, they were stupid and foolish: "For my people are foolish; they know me not; they are stupid children" (Jer 4.22). The Israelites are oftentimes portrayed as unfaithful, backsliding children. Still, God pleads with them to come back and promises healing: "Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness" (Jer 3.22). God's covenant love surpasses Israel's backsliding and he promises the advent of a renewed sonship: "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God'" (Hos 1.10). This promise announces a new level of sonship through redemptive adoption, revealed in the New Testament.

The emphasis in the Old Testament lies more on God as Father of the nation Israel rather on God as Father of individual Israelites. The concept of a divine fatherhood in relation to (all) individuals is not evident in the Old Testament, as Palmer observes: "The emphasis is upon Israel as the son, and not upon the separate individuals as children."¹¹⁰ However, since a nation consists

¹¹⁰ Palmer, quoted in Angus Stewart, "Adoption - A Theological exposition of a neglected doctrine".

of a certain number of individuals, it would be unwise to insist on specific dogmatic formulae. An exception, for instance, is found in 2 Samuel, where God promises David to be the Father of his son Solomon: "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son" (2 Sam 7.14; comp. 1 Chr 28.6).¹¹¹ Israel's kings, in particular David, enjoyed a privileged relationship with God (Ps 89.19-29). However, in general, there is no specific verse in the Old Testament where an individual prays to God as his Father. The utterings in Isaiah 63.16, 64.7, Jeremiah 3.4, and Psalm 89.27 come near to the idea, "but they are statements and not addresses to God using the name Father"¹¹², comments Joachim Jeremias. Although there are allusions regarding the fatherhood of God in relation to individuals in the *Targumim* and *Midrashim*, the Israelites generally fought shy of calling God their Father.¹¹³ Cranfield observes that "though there is a marked reserve in the OT with regard to speaking of God as the Father of the individual Israelite ..., the thought of God's fatherly relationship to the individual was to some extent implicit all along in the conception

¹¹¹ For a detailed exposition see James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God - An exegetical investigation into the background of huiiothesia in the Pauline corpus*, 96-117.

¹¹² Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 63.

¹¹³ For example, as one can see from the Targum, Jews avoided the term *abba* in relation to God. In the three Old Testament passages where God is called *ʾabbā*, the Targum twice renders *ribbuni* (my Lord) and uses only once *abba* as translation (compare Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 65).

of Israel's adoption."¹¹⁴ Taken together, Israel – as a nation as well as individuals – had the right to call God her Father, but the Israelites hesitated to do so as we find no clear instance of it in the Old Testament. This supports the common interpretation of Israel as a “minor son” (Gal 4.1ff), compared to the full redemptive sonship as revealed in the age of the new covenant under Jesus Christ.

Our short glance at the Old Testament illustrates that divine sonship in the full meaning of the concept was not revealed under the old covenant. The Israelites were more like servants than real sons, as Girardeau explains: “The Old Testament saints ... were minor children, under bondage to tutors and governors. They were as if servants. They were more characterized by the temper of servants than by that of sons.”¹¹⁵ Bavinck employs a similar rendering when he notes: “They were children, it is true, but children who were minors, and therefore like servants who are placed under guardians and wards until the time determined by the Father.”¹¹⁶ As Hosea's prophecy shows, true sonship was still to come. In Romans 9, Paul picks up the Old Testament promise: “As indeed he says in Hosea, ‘Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved’” (Rom 9.25).

¹¹⁴ Charles E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 2, 461.

¹¹⁵ John L. Girardeau, *Discussions of Theological Questions*, 493.

¹¹⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 467.

We discover the promise of a new sonship in the Old Testament, whereas the consummation takes place in the New Testament. So, while God was already portrayed as an adopting God in the Old Testament, “adoption had not been as clearly revealed as it has today”¹¹⁷, notes Calvin. The adoption metaphor is rooted in Old Testament Israel and finds its superior fulfilment under the new covenant. The common aspect in both cases is that a sovereign God adopts for himself a people for the display of his glory; not because of anything they achieved or are, but only by grace, undeserved, without merit. Adoption receives its fullest meaning only in the New Testament. Hence, the Old Testament Theocratic adoption is a prototype, a foreshadowing for New Testament redemptive adoption.

¹¹⁷ John Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians*, 373.

2. Redemptive adoption in the New Testament

But now Jehovah exercises His Sovereignty in a gracious act of adoption, by which He brings the justified one into the relation of a child to himself. He now becomes his loving Father, as well as his gracious King. He has him now in His house, as well as in His kingdom. He reckons him 'among the children' as surely as among the subjects. He hath him, not merely under the protection of His arm, as King, He embraces him on His bosom as a Father.¹¹⁸

John Kennedy

Whereas in Theocratic adoption, the focus was on the nation of Israel as God's son, in redemptive adoption the centre of attention shifts to individuals as God's children. Redemptive adoption "is concerned with the Fatherhood of God in relation to the redeemed"¹¹⁹, it is an "act of transfer from an alien family into the family of God himself"¹²⁰, as Murray describes it. Hence, under the term "redemptive adoption" we understand the dealings of God by

¹¹⁸ John Kennedy, *Man's Relations to God - Traced in the Light of the present Truth*, 71.

¹¹⁹ John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 2, 223.

¹²⁰ John Murray, *Redemption - accomplished and applied*, 134.

which, through his sovereign grace, he transforms a sinner and transports him from an evil household into the family of God, and endows him with certain rights and privileges. The whole of God's children, brothers and sisters, comprise the church, the body of Christ.

We need to be aware of the connections between adoption, fatherhood and sonship. These terms are interrelated and co-dependent. In the New Testament, the term "adoption" (*huiiothesia*) itself is confined to the Apostle Paul, whereas related concepts like sonship, fatherhood, and new birth are predominant in the Gospels. Scholars often focus on one special subject (e.g. *huiiothesia* in Paul) and leave aside related notions. Only when taken together are we able to see the whole picture.

In what follows, we will, first, examine the concept of sonship in the Synoptic Gospels, turning then to "adoption" in Paul's writings and comparing it with John's teaching.

2.1 The Synoptic Gospels: Children of God

In the Synoptic Gospels, "Father" becomes the title for God. God's only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, announces the dawn of a new relationship between God and mankind. This does not amount however, to preaching a universal fatherhood. To employ Whaling's terms again, Jesus clearly taught that, though humankind is a child of God in a natural sense (the prodigal son is *de facto* a son), he is spiritually and legally dead (as the prodigal son was dead; comp. Luke 15.24).

Consequently, we cannot understand sonship in a liberal (universal) sense. Rather, the position of true sonship is reserved for Christ's disciples. Jesus underlines this as he never calls God "Father" in a universal sense, but only in relation to his disciples (Matt 6.18). The title *Gotteskinder* (German for "children of God") is reserved for Christ's pupils, and only they may pray "Our Father in heaven" (Matt 6.9). Altogether, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount clearly shows that the application of God's fatherhood to human beings takes effect only regarding the disciples, not all humanity (Matt 5.1).

Interestingly, in some sense, Jesus is also Father. One can assume this from the prophecy in Isaiah, where Christ is called "everlasting Father" (Isa 9.6) – therefore he can say to the paralytic: "*My child*, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2.5, author's translation, emphasis added).

Jesus also emphasised that his relationship with the Father is of a different kind from the relation between his disciples and their heavenly Father. As we have noticed before, the *paternitas* of God in regard to Jesus has to be distinguished from the relationship between God and his human sons and daughters. Christ's *filiatio* is essentially different from our sonship. Thus, Jesus calls God Father in a unique sense: God is *His* Father (*patros mou, πατρός μου*) who delivers all things to him (Luke 10.22). Furthermore, God is *His* Father, who reveals the Son (Matt 11.27; 16.17). Jesus therefore speaks to the disciples of "*your* Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5.16,45,48; 6.1; 7.11; Mark 11.25,26), and when speaking of himself, he renders "*my* Father who is in heaven" (Matt 15.13; 18.35). Griffith Thomas notes in this context that

this relationship between God the Father and God the Son is unique and exclusive, for in this Sonship no creature has a part. No one is 'Son' as Christ is, and for this reason He never associates us with Himself by speaking of 'Our Father'. Christ always distinguishes between his Sonship and ourselves, as when He speaks of the Father of me and the Father of you.¹²¹

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel", preaches Jesus, the Messiah (Mark 1.15). In his teaching, Jesus combines the *Gotteskindschaft* with the coming kingdom: that is, with the installation of the new kingdom, a new kind of sonship is to be inaugurated. It is the kind of sonship the prophet Hosea has prophesied about ("Children of the living God", Hos 1.10). Everyone who belongs to the messianic church will be a son of the "Most High" (Luke 6.35), and a son of the light (Luke 16.8). That is, "only in the sphere of the *basileia* is God the Father", as Jeremias observes.¹²² Only as a child of God, can one enter into the kingdom of God (Matt 18.3), and only those who belong to the kingdom of God are true children of God. The church itself is the daughter of God, as Edwards notes: "The church is the daughter of God, not only as he hath begotten her by his word and Spirit, but as she is the spouse of his eternal Son."¹²³

¹²¹ Griffith W.H. Thomas, *The Principles of Theology - An Introduction to the thirty-nine articles*, 497.

¹²² Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 180.

¹²³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1, 689.

This new level of sonship is mediated by Jesus Christ. He is Prophet, Priest and King. In Matthew 11, Jesus reveals himself as the Mediator of sonship: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt 11.27). This expresses the strong personal relationship between God and his Son Jesus Christ. Both know each other perfectly well, and Jesus applies himself to the revelatory work that gives a sinful human being special knowledge of the Father. Only through the mediation of Christ can a potential son or daughter have access to the Father. In a separate chapter we will analyse the role of the Son in redemptive adoption in more detail.

The adopted sons and daughters of God enjoy many privileges. They are free from their former evil household (Matt 17.26) and are promised God's provision (Matt 6.30) and care (Matt 6.32-33). As legal members of the church, the children of God have the right of inheritance (Matt 5.5). When the prodigal son returned, he received a ring, as a symbol of his re-installation into all the rights and privileges of a true son of God, as an honoured member of God's family (Luke 15.22). God's children enjoy freedom (Luke 14.18) and joy in God, their Father (Luke 10.20).

As children, the redeemed are obligated to fulfil certain responsibilities. Primarily, they have to do the will of their Father and obey. Jesus encourages his disciples to act out their sonship – he instructs them: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,"⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5.44-45a). As "sons of the

Most High" (Luke 6.35), they must be peacemakers (Matt 5.9), and they are required to be perfect, as God himself is perfect (Matt 5.48). However, Jesus did not teach perfectionism, otherwise he would not have instructed his disciples to pray for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 6.12). "The ethical deed is never the reason, but always the consequence of *Gotteskindschaft*"¹²⁴, explains Twisselmann accordingly. That is, the imperative is based on the indicative. What God requires from his sons and daughters, he also freely gives (Mark 11.22; Acts 2.38; Eph 2.8; 2 Tim 2.25) – as Augustine notes: "Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt." (*Confessions*, X, XXIX, 40).¹²⁵ Therefore, God's children will always be dependent on God's grace and never be able to boast in themselves but instead must render glory to God, who works in them, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil 2.13).

In the introduction of the "Lord's Prayer", Jesus explains to his disciples how God wants his children to pray. First, to hallow God's name should be their foremost concern. Sons and daughters of God need to protect God's name, and make sure that he is revealed and blessed throughout the world. Secondly, the children of God are to make the kingdom of God a priority in their life and work. They are the citizens of the new kingdom and are responsible for the spreading of the kingdom. Thirdly, God's children have to pray

¹²⁴ Willi Twisselmann, *Die Gotteskindschaft der Christen nach dem Neuen Testament*, author's translation, 48.

¹²⁵ Aurelius Augustine, "The Confessions of Saint Augustine", in Marcus Dods, ed., *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, Vol. 14, 265.

that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. On the one hand, they are passive, as they rejoice about God's sovereign work in the world (and as they cannot will against God), on the other hand, they are active – they comply with God's will and ensure that his will is done by them. We are obligated to work for and towards the kingdom of God and his honour.

Compared to the writings of John and Paul, the eschatological aspect of sonship is treated only tangentially in the Synoptic Gospels. Jeremias notes that "being a child of God brings the certainty of a share in future salvation."¹²⁶ Faithful servants are promised a reward in heaven (Luke 6.23) as they will hear Jesus saying to them: "Enter into the joy of your master" (Matt 25.23). Another aspect of the future constitution of the children of God is that they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection (Luke 20.36).

With the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, a new form of sonship is revealed. "Sonship is therefore a gift of the great time of redemption that has dawned with Christ"¹²⁷, and is connected with the kingdom of God. Christ's disciples have the right to call God their Father. Jesus makes clear that he is the one and only Mediator who provides revelation of and access to the Father. As Christ is the only Mediator between God and mankind, only through him can one become a true son or daughter of God. Sons and daughters of God enjoy divine privileges, they have certain responsibilities,

¹²⁶ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 181.

¹²⁷ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul - An Outline of His Theology*, 198.

and they pray in a God-honouring manner until they are finally welcomed into the joy of their Master.

2.2 Adoption as sons in Paul

Compared to the Synoptics, we find a much more systematic picture of sonship in Paul's writings. In what follows we will give an introduction to Paul's conception of redemptive adoption. After highlighting Paul's use of the adoption metaphor (*huiiothesia*), we attempt to trace the background of the metaphor (Old Testament/Jewish *versus* Greco-Roman). Furthermore, a comparison between the adoption metaphor and distinct features of the redemptive process will contribute to a deeper understanding of Paul's concept of adoption.

The use of the Hellenistic term *huiiothesia* (ὁιοθεσία) is confined to the writings of the Apostle Paul. It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, the *LXX*, or extra-canonical Jewish literature. This unparalleled use of *huiiothesia* in Scripture makes the interpretation quite tricky, as we will observe in the following paragraphs.

In Paul's writings there are 5 occurrences of *huiiothesia* (Rom 8.15,23; 9.4; Gal 4.5; Eph 1.5). Paul uses *huiiothesia* first in Galatians 4.5, which is also the "*locus classicus* of the biblical doctrine of adoption"¹²⁸: "to redeem those

¹²⁸ Tim J. R. Trumper, "The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation II: The Adoption Metaphor in Theological Usage", 101.

who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption [*υιοθεσία*] as sons.” The two main other occurrences are Romans 8.15: For “you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption [*υιοθεσία*] as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”, and Ephesians 1.5: “he predestined us for adoption [*υιοθεσία*] through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.”

The term *huiiothesia* is composed of two Greek words: *huios* = son¹²⁹, and *tithemi* = to place, appoint (compare e.g. Cranfield¹³⁰ and Scott¹³¹). Thus, *huiiothesia* literally denotes the “placing of/as sons.”

However, scholars differ in their translation of *huiiothesia*. James Scott comes to the conclusion that “*υιοθεσία* denotes ‘adoption as son.’”¹³² Bible translations English Standard Version, King James Version, American Standard Version, and Revised Standard Version, together read, similarly, “adoption as/of sons”, whereas the New International Version translates “rights of

¹²⁹ Paul’s use of “son” reflects his background of a patriarchal society. Yet, the context of the previously mentioned passages makes plain that also females are included. When we use the terms “son(s)”, “sonship” etc. we view them also as representatives of females (daughters).

¹³⁰ Charles E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 1, 397.

¹³¹ James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God - An exegetical investigation into the background of huiiothesia in the Pauline corpus*, 13-57.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 55.

sons.” Interestingly, German translations avoid using the German term “Adoption”¹³³ for *huiiothesia* at all. Although “Adoption als Söhne” (“adoption as sons”) would certainly make sense, Luther prefers to use the term “Kind-schaft” (a literal equivalent would be “childship”). The “Elberfelder” translation reads similarly, employing the term “Sohnschaft” (“sonship”), whereas Schlachter translates “Sohnesrecht” (“right as son”).

Taken together, it should be noted that translations that only translate “sonship” fall short of the full meaning of *huiiothesia*. The action of placing (the son) needs to be emphasised as well. Scott argues that, “In Paul, as in contemporary extra-biblical sources, *huiiothesia* always denotes either the process or the state of being adopted as son(s).”¹³⁴ Therefore, we suggest a flexible interpretation of *huiiothesia*. That is, the noun denotes an act (act of adoption, placing), as well as a state (having the right to be a son; “to have an installation or a placement as a son”¹³⁵, as Boice renders it).

Although we might struggle today with different translations of *huiiothesia*, the meaning of the term was clearly understandable to the original recipients. The expression *huiiothesia* occurs frequently in Hellenistic Greek, as Edward Hicks notes: “No word is more common in Greek inscriptions of the Hellenistic time; the idea, like the word, is native Greek.”¹³⁶ Therefore, when

¹³³ The German noun “Adoption” denotes the same meaning as English “adoption.”

¹³⁴ James M. Scott, *DPL*, 15.

¹³⁵ James M. Boice, *Romans*, Vol. 2, 838.

¹³⁶ Edward L. Hicks, quoted in Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 315.

Paul introduced *huiiothesia* as a metaphor, he knew that his contemporary readers in the Roman sphere would understand him. Adolf Deissmann comments that “the frequent occurrence of the term indicates that Paul used a metaphor intelligible to everybody as he made us of *υιοθεσία* in the religious language usage.”¹³⁷

Having clarified the semantic dimension of *huiiothesia*, we are able to move on and examine Paul’s concept of redemptive adoption.

James Scott¹³⁸, among others (e.g. Byrne¹³⁹, Ridderbos¹⁴⁰, Rossell¹⁴¹, Twisselmann¹⁴², and Trumper¹⁴³), has argued for a distinct Old Testament/Jewish background for adoption in Pauline theology.

¹³⁷ Adolf Deissmann, quoted in James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God - An exegetical investigation into the background of huiiothesia in the Pauline corpus*, 55.

¹³⁸ James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God - An exegetical investigation into the background of huiiothesia in the Pauline corpus*.

¹³⁹ Byrne ignores germane evidence for an interpretation in favour of a Greco-Roman background and states: “Paul’s reference to *υιοθεσία* in a formal list of the privileges in Rom 9:4-5 would seem to align him very closely to the ‘sonship of God’ tradition of the Jewish background” (Brendan Byrne, ‘Sons of God’ – ‘Seed of Abraham’: *A Study of the Idea of Sonship of God of All Christians in Paul against the Jewish Background*, 84).

¹⁴⁰ While Ridderbos admits that the term *huiiothesia* stems from a Hellenistic legal background, “its content, however, must not be inferred from the various Roman or Greek legal systems..., but must rather be considered against the Old Testament, re-

In analysing Galatians 4.1-7, for example, Scott distinguishes between a first and second exodus and, correspondingly, between a “type” and “antitype” of adoptive sonship.¹⁴⁴ He assumes a harmony between the “type”, which represents Israel’s redemption to divine adoptive sonship at the time of the exodus (Gal 4.1-2), and the “antitype”, eschatologically fulfilled in redemptive-historical background” (Herman Ridderbos, *Paul - An Outline of His Theology*, 197-198).

¹⁴¹ Rossell’s unsatisfying argument for an Old Testament background is that Paul, as a “Jew is writing to a core of people within each community which is predominantly Jewish in background” (William H. Rossell, “New Testament Adoption: Graeco-Roman or Semitic?”, 233). This conclusion is strange insofar as Paul’s readers lived in a sphere dominated by Roman legislation – therefore, on the contrary, many of them had also no Jewish background whatsoever.

¹⁴² Twisselmann also favours an interpretation of a Jewish background when he notes that “*υιοθεσία* must be understood and explained from the Old Testament and the Jewish tradition, for Paul is based on it” (Willi Twisselmann, *Die Gotteskindschaft der Christen nach dem Neuen Testament*, author’s translation, 56).

¹⁴³ Writes Trumper: “The use of *huiiothesia* in a redemptive-historical perspective of the Old Testament is the key to a clear understanding ... of adoption.” (Tim J. R. Trumper, “The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation II: The Adoption Metaphor in Theological Usage”, 111). Compare also the following statement by Trumper: “Paul’s usage of it [*huiiothesia*] strongly suggests he filled it with historical and theological content derived from the OT.” (Tim J. R. Trumper, “A Fresh Exposition of Adoption: I. An Outline”, 62).

¹⁴⁴ Compare James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God - An exegetical investigation into the background of huiiothesia in the Pauline corpus*, 121-217.

demption through Christ (the believer's redemption to divine adoptive sonship at the time of the second exodus, Gal 4.3-7). Scott tries to find support for his assumptions in Romans 9.4 (*huiiothesia* as one of Israel's privileges) and in the broader context of Galatians 3-4. Here, Christ is depicted as the heir of Abraham (Gal 3.16), and the promised messianic king in 2 Samuel 7.12 and 14.

Therefore, Scott views *ton huiiothesian* (τὴν υἱοθεσίαν) in Galatians 4.5 as referring to "the Jewish eschatological expectation based on 2 Samuel 7:14."¹⁴⁵

According to Scott, the adoption metaphor in Galatians 4 does not depict a Roman heir held in infancy until the time of majority stipulated by his father but rather the state of Israel that awaits its release from the Egyptian bondage. He concludes: "While the context of *υἱοθεσία* in Gal. 4:5 gives no reason to suspect a Greco-Roman background for the term, the whole line of argumentation in Gal. 3-4, together with Pauline parallels, leads unambiguously to an Old Testament/Jewish background of adoption for the term ..., and particularly to the 2 Sam. 7:14 tradition."¹⁴⁶ Moreover, Scott assumes that, similar to the Galatians passage, Romans 8 contains elements of exodus typology. That is, divine adoption implies heirship with Christ in the Abrahamic promise now (Rom 8.17), as well as in the future (v.23). Scott comes to the conclusion that "In sum, therefore, ... there is a unified and specific Old Testament/Jewish background of 'adoption as sons' (*υἱοθεσία*) in the *Corpus Paulinum*: the word occurs four times in the sense of adoption expected by the 2 Sam. 7:14 tradi-

¹⁴⁵ James M. Scott, *DPL*, 17.

¹⁴⁶ James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God - An exegetical investigation into the background of huiiothesia in the Pauline corpus*, 268.

tion ..., and that in either a present ... or future aspect ..., depending on the Christological and heilsgeschichtliche moment stressed in each context.”¹⁴⁷

In assessing Scott’s deductions, several notes have to be added, for, taken together, Scott does not present conclusive evidence.¹⁴⁸ First of all, it is incomprehensible why Scott *a priori* turns down the plausible interpretation of *huiothesia* against a Greco-Roman setting in favour of an Old Testament perspective. Over against Scott’s assumptions, the context and the meaning of *huiothesia* certainly do speak for a Greco-Roman background. In fact, it is the most reasonable and convincing interpretation as we will see in the next section. Furthermore, we must question Scott’s exodus typology. His exclusive emphasis on a Jewish eschatological expectation of sonship or rather adoption is not persuasive. This is primarily because adoption as a concept, as Paul must have had in mind, was unknown to the Israelites. Scott skirts around the fact that a legal concept of adoption was actually nonexistent in ancient Judaism. Wright notes that the “subject of adoption is very hazy in the Old Testament.”¹⁴⁹ Adoption in the strict sense of a legal process is unknown to Talmu-

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁴⁸ Compare Trevor J. Burke’s critique in *Adopted into God’s family. Exploring a Pauline metaphor*, 55-58. See also Walters for a critical examination of Scott’s type/antitype approach (J.C. Walters, “Paul, Adoption and Inheritance”, in J.P. Sampley, ed., *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, 42-76).

¹⁴⁹ Christopher J.H. Wright, *God’s People in God’s Land: Family, Land and Property in the Old Testament*, 17.

dic law¹⁵⁰; it is “impossible to trace adoption to Jewish law”, writes Hester.¹⁵¹ James Dunn notes that Paul’s adoption metaphor was “no doubt drawn from Paul’s experience of Roman law and custom, since it was not a Jewish practice as such.”¹⁵² Yet, there are adoption-like instances in the Old Testament. Or, as Hendriksen clarifies, the Old Testament shows instances of *essential*, but not *formal, technical* adoption.¹⁵³ Hence, what Scott calls “adoption” is often more a matter of fostering than a true adoption procedure. Adoption-like cases are for instance found in Genesis 15.2-3: “But Abram said, ‘O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’”³ And Abram said, ‘Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.’” Agreeing with Scott’s approach, Rossell views this incident as factual adoption.¹⁵⁴ Yet, this comparison is clearly excessive, for this example only shows that Abraham’s slave Eliezer would have inherited from his master, no more and no less. Yet, this *post-mortem* “adoption” would not include a continuation of the family line, nor could we speak of an adoption in a legal (Roman) sense. Neverthe-

¹⁵⁰ Kaufmann Kohler, *JE*, 207.

¹⁵¹ J.D. Hester, quoted in Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family. Exploring a Pauline metaphor*, 70.

¹⁵² James D.G. Dunn, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, 217.

¹⁵³ William Hendriksen, *Romans*, Vol. 1, 259.

¹⁵⁴ Writes Rossell: “I believe that the Apostle had the idea of Abraham’s adoption of his slave Eliezer in mind as he wrote this concept of adoption” (William H. Rossell, “New Testament Adoption: Graeco-Roman or Semitic?“, 234).

less, in order to substantiate his argument, Scott tries to establish a connection between this instance in Genesis 15 and practices in the ancient Mesopotamian city of Nuzi.¹⁵⁵ However, while a sort of precursor of the (Roman) adoption practice is vaguely documented in the Nuzi archives, the connection seems far-fetched. Francis Lyall notes that this interpretation "seems to be pushing things too far."¹⁵⁶ Esther's adoption is also an instance of *post-mortem* adoption: "He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter" (Esther 2.7). This case is more an extension of the levirate marriage¹⁵⁷ rather than a full, formal adoption, and, as Donner remarks, "The *Leviratsgedanke* rules out every possibility and necessity of adoption."¹⁵⁸ It is not likely that in case of Mordechai's death Esther would have inherited his estate in preference to nearer blood relations, reads *The Jewish Encyclopedia*.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, the *filiation* of Esther speaks against

¹⁵⁵ For a survey of ancient Near Eastern forms of adoption consult: R. Yaron, "Variation adoption".

¹⁵⁶ Francis Lyall, "Roman Law in the Writings of Paul: Adoption", 463.

¹⁵⁷ The institution of the levirate marriage says that if a man died without offspring, his brother was responsible for marrying the widow and raising children who would become heirs of the deceased brother and his estate (compare Deut 25.5-10).

¹⁵⁸ Herbert Donner, "Adoption oder Legitimation - Erwägungen zur Adoption im Alten Testament", 107.

¹⁵⁹ Kaufmann Kohler, *JE*, 208.

adoption,¹⁶⁰ that is, Esther cannot continue Mordechai's line as she was female.¹⁶¹ Also in Moses' case one cannot speak of a formal adoption (Exod 2.10). It was much more a case of fostering.¹⁶² Donner makes clear that the instances mentioned above are only "traces" of adoption, and that we should assume adoption only then, when there is a real adoption, that is, a "Annahme an Kindes statt" (*adoption filii loco*).¹⁶³

In sum, the above mentioned patterns cannot be identified as adoptions in a legal sense. There is no indication of a legal code for adoption in Israel, as Prévost notes: "Talking about a Hebrew legislation of adoption is talking about a subject that doesn't exist."¹⁶⁴ The Old Testament does not speak of an adoption ritual in the sense as we, marked by Roman law, understand it today – "Adoption in the Roman sense did not exist among the ancient Hebrews."¹⁶⁵ The reason for that lies mainly in the lack of necessity for the practice of a legal adoption practice in Old Testament times, as *The Jewish Encyclopedia* points out: "Adoption in a legal sense is practically unknown in lands and conditions in which in case of childlessness a man may marry another wife in

¹⁶⁰ Herbert Donner, "Adoption oder Legitimation - Erwägungen zur Adoption im Alten Testament", 105.

¹⁶¹ Francis Lyall, "Roman Law in the Writings of Paul: Adoption", 462.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 461.

¹⁶³ Herbert Donner, "Adoption oder Legitimation - Erwägungen zur Adoption im Alten Testament".

¹⁶⁴ Marcel-Henri Prévost, "Remarques sur l'Adoption dans la Bible", author's translation, 68-69.

¹⁶⁵ Kaufmann Kohler, *JE*, 208.

order to beget a son for his heir."¹⁶⁶ Therefore, "the device of adoption was unnecessary and hence unknown in Jewish law"¹⁶⁷, concludes Lyall.

In the light of these considerations it is, therefore, surprising that Scott argues as follows: "Despite frequent claims to the contrary, however, the concept of adoption – even divine adoption – was certainly known to the OT and Judaism, regardless of whether it was ever actually practiced."¹⁶⁸ The reason for Scott's misleading argumentation can be traced back to his broad definition of adoption, that is, Scott does not distinguish formal/legal and essential adoption. He conceives of the cases mentioned before as formal adoptions.¹⁶⁹ The dilemma of Scott's argumentation consists in his fruitless attempts to transfer a Roman *terminus technicus* to a different setting, context, and practice.

As a whole, it is not comprehensible why Scott excludes the reasonable interpretation of adoption as a legal metaphor, embedded in Paul's Roman background. Scott is on the right path, however, in assuming that the Old Testament adoption of the nation of Israel is a type for New Testament redemptive adoption. The Old Testament clearly announces the coming of an essentially new dimension of sonship: a divine sonship through redemptive adoption. On the one hand, Scott's interpretation of *huiiothesia* goes too far and on

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Francis Lyall, "Roman Law in the Writings of Paul: Adoption", 459.

¹⁶⁸ James M Scott, *DPL*, 16.

¹⁶⁹ Compare James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God - An exegetical investigation into the background of huiiothesia in the Pauline corpus*, 75-88.

the other hand Scott fails to see adoption as a redemptive fact with spiritual and legal consequences, revealed in the New Testament. Therefore, his parallels fall short of the supreme quality of redemptive adoption in Paul's writings. Judged from what we have been discussing above, we must therefore doubt Scott's supposition of an exclusive Old Testament/Jewish background for *huiothesia* and rather vote for the primacy of a Greco-Roman background.¹⁷⁰

As a basis, we hold that Paul's use of *huiothesia* was primarily determined by a Greco-Roman background. It seems thoroughly reasonable to suppose that "Paul took the idea of adoption from Greek and Roman law."¹⁷¹ Many reasons underpin this conclusion. As Paul was born a Roman citizen, he was certainly familiar with the socio-legal practice of adoption. Paul uses the term *huiothesia* in letters to churches where Roman law was in operation.¹⁷² With this, Paul could guarantee that his recipients would understand the meaning of the metaphor, that is, what the adoption metaphor signified in the spiritual realm. The course of action and outcomes of Roman adoption are in many parts spiritually applicable to redemptive adoption. In order to illustrate the forensic aspect of redemptive adoption, Paul chose the term *huiothesia*, intelligible for the recipients: "The churches of Ephesians and Galatians were situ-

¹⁷⁰ Argues White: "Paul often has Jewish models in mind, but it is inconceivable that his idea of adoption was determined entirely by Jewish antecedents." (John L. White, *The Apostle of God - Paul and the Promise of Abraham*, 179).

¹⁷¹ James M. Boice, *Romans*, Vol. 2, 840.

¹⁷² Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles*, 82-83.

ated in centers of population, each with Roman authority present, and the church in Rome would certainly know its local law”¹⁷³, notes Lyall and continues: “Roman law is the only suitable source of reference for Paul. Jewish law, the obvious alternative, does not possess the concept.”¹⁷⁴

Taken together, to interpret Paul’s use of *huiothesia* against a Greco-Roman background is probably the “most reasonable alternative.”¹⁷⁵ However, the two approaches should not stand as distinct from each other – rather, they should be regarded as complementary. Hendriksen goes down this road in trying to reconcile both approaches as follows: “It is clear, therefore, that when in Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:5 Paul uses the term ‘adoption’ the *word* and the *legal standing* were borrowed from Roman practise, but the *essence* from divine revelation in the Old Testament.”¹⁷⁶ Cranfield¹⁷⁷, Moo¹⁷⁸, as well as Burke¹⁷⁹

¹⁷³ Francis Lyall, “Roman Law in the Writings of Paul: Adoption”, 465.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 459.

¹⁷⁵ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians - An Exegetical Commentary*, 195.

¹⁷⁶ William Hendriksen, *Romans*, Vol. 1, 259.

¹⁷⁷ “Since adoption as a legal act was not a Jewish institution, Paul may reasonably be assumed to have had Greek or Roman adoption in mind. At the same time..., it is unwise to claim that the background of the metaphor is exclusively Graeco-Roman. When Paul used the word *υιοθεσία* he must surely have had OT material very much in mind” (Charles E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 1, 397).

¹⁷⁸ “However, while the institution is a Greco-Roman one, the underlying concept is rooted in the OT and Judaism” (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 501).

choose a similar path. Thus, essentially, redemptive adoption represents the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy while in a judicial context, *huiothesia* as a metaphor denotes the forensic mode of transferring the sinner from a foreign household into the kingdom of God, equipping him with rights and privileges, as we will further scrutinise.

In order to understand the adoption metaphor we need to examine the legal procedure of adoption at Paul's time. We will first take a look at the background of adoption in Greek sources and then examine the Roman practice of adoption.

In Attic adoption, the adopter's personal interests were paramount. The purpose of adoption in Greek life¹⁸⁰ was to perpetuate the family line when the head of the family had no offspring at all, or when he had no son and wanted to avoid another claiming his daughter as an heiress. Another main reason for adoption was that the adoptive father had to make provision for his care in his old age. The adoptee was generally an adult, often closely related and almost always male, seldom female (because only a son could perpetuate the family line; that is why we use mainly the term "son" in the following paragraphs).

¹⁷⁹ "We cannot neatly compartmentalize ancient society into 'Jewish' and 'Graeco-Roman' worlds, since these cultural backgrounds were inextricably woven together prior to the time of the apostle Paul" (Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family. Exploring a Pauline metaphor*, 46).

¹⁸⁰ For a detailed summary on Greek adoption see: Martin S. Smith, "Greek Adoptive Formulae".

Nevertheless, as “daughters” might also have been subjects of adoption, we view them as included under the terminology).

One can distinguish three different forms of Greek adoption. In adoption *inter vivos* the adopter acquired an adopted son during his life time. The proceeding required that the son to be adopted was first introduced to the associated relatives, then to the religious brotherhood, and finally into the local township. All three bodies had to witness the adoption. In “testamentary” adoption, the adopter designated an adopted son in his will and the adoption took effect after the adopter’s death (the adoptee’s claim had to be established by the courts). Finally, the “posthumous” mode of adoption indicates that if a man died without legitimate offspring, the next-of-kin was adopted into the family of the deceased.

Greek adoption was restricted by law and custom. It was, for instance, demanded that both parties had to be Greek citizens. Furthermore, the adoptee had to be the legitimate son of another marriage (not necessarily a relative, but that was often the case), whereas the adopter had to be without a legitimate son and free from outstanding debts, conviction or indebtedness to the state. Additionally, the adopter had to be in his right mind, acting under his own volition.¹⁸¹

The adopted son had certain rights and duties. As the perpetuator of his adoptive father’s family, he received a new name. He had to serve and honour his adoptive father and care for him when he was needy. After the adopter’s

¹⁸¹ James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God - An exegetical investigation into the background of huiothesia in the Pauline corpus*, 5.

death, the adoptee had to worship him, as well as the family shrine. The adoptee was privileged insofar as he had the right of inheritance, that is, he was the legal heir of his adoptive father. In *inter vivos* adoption the adoptive son even had the status of a natural son.

Now, could Paul have referred to Greek adoption practice in the use of the metaphor? Judged from a historical perspective we must say, no. Although Jewish culture was influenced by Greek law from the reign of Alexander the Great onwards, it is doubtful that Paul had Greek law in mind. Under Pompeius (67 B.C.), Roman jurisdiction arrived in Palestine and remained prevalent until Paul's time. Although the Greek *modi* of adoption were certainly exemplary for the development of a more thorough legislation under the Roman Empire, it is more probable that Paul was referring to the Roman law of adoption. Hoehner notes that "it is highly improbable that the people of the first century A.D. would be following Greek law when the Romans had overtaken the Greek territory more than a century ago. Hence, it is implausible that Paul relied on the Greek law and customs in his use of *υιοθεσία*, for in all five instances he was addressing people who lived under Roman law."¹⁸²

Roman adoption denotes a "fictive Filiation"¹⁸³, that is, the purpose of Roman adoption was, like the Greek procedures, the legal transmitting of a name, an inheritance, or a succession.¹⁸⁴ Hence, a *patria potestas*¹⁸⁵ was estab-

¹⁸² Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians - An Exegetical Commentary*, 195.

¹⁸³ Christiane Kunst, "Adoption und Testamentsadoption in der späten Republik", 87.

¹⁸⁴ For a broader view over the social context of adoption see Marijan Horvat, "Les aspects sociaux de l'adrogation et de l'adoption a Rome."

lished over the adoptee. Roman adoption was also used for social and political manoeuvring. Sometimes, the adopter just wanted to avoid the responsibility and effort of raising his own children.

Four different *modi* of Roman adoption¹⁸⁶ can be identified. Of prime importance for us are only the first two: *adrogatio* (*arrogatio*, "arrogation") and *adoptio* (similar to Greek *inter vivos*). The other two instances are "testamentary" adoption (similar to Greek's testamentary procedure)¹⁸⁷, and *testamentum calatis comitiis* (similar to the Greek posthumous adoption).¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ The Roman legal notion of *patria potestas* subjected the sons and daughters (*fili*, *filiae familias*) to the *paterfamilias* (in general the eldest male) in the Roman household. The *paterfamilias* enjoyed a vast sphere of influence. He had *vitalis necisque potestas* (power of life and death) over the members of his household; he was also permitted to sell his children (*in mancipio esse*). Those who lived in the household remained under the *potestas* of the *paterfamilias* until his death. Unlike in Greek and Teutonic law, the *patria potestas* continued even though the sons may have reached majority (Max Kaser, *Römisches Privatrecht*, 277-285).

¹⁸⁶ Compare for a detailed overview: Christiane Kunst, "Adoption und Testamentsadoption in der späten Republik".

¹⁸⁷ In testamentary adoption, name and estate were transferred in a private procedure. Hence, it is not clear whether this legal process comes under "true" adoption (compare Ronald Syme, *Clues to Testamentary Adoption*). This concept appears more in literary rather in judicial sources – it is probably a relict of the Greek testamentary adoption (compare Max Kaser, *Römisches Privatrecht*, 283).

¹⁸⁸ This *modus* is related to *arrogatio*, i.e. it is a matter of *arrogatio* that becomes legally valid after the death of the testator (Max Kaser, *Römisches Privatrecht*, 283).

In *adrogatio*, a person *sui iuris* (free of his father's *potestas*) was adopted by another individual *sui iuris*.¹⁸⁹ In the process of *adrogatio*, the adoptee lost the *patria potestas* over his own household, and he, together with his household and property came under the *potestas* of the adoptive father. Consequently, an *adrogatio* actually extinguished one family to perpetuate another. This kind of adoption required exceptional pre-examinations (*rogatio*)¹⁹⁰, public approval (*populi auctoritate*), and pontifical sanction – respectively the emperor's approval (*principali rescripto*).¹⁹¹ Therefore, the *modus* of *adrogatio* could take place only in Rome.

In *adoptio*, two heads of families concluded an agreement: One son was conveyed from the *potestas* of his natural father to the *potestas* of his adoptive father. This mode (*adoptio*, or *adoptio sensu stricto*, *datio in adoptionem*) was a later development in Roman law to supplement *adrogatio*. *Adoptio* denotes a secular transaction and is generally less formal and more private than *adrogatio*. Requiring no public approval, *adoptio* did not lead to an extensive reordering of society as *adrogatio* (where the household of the arrogated was extinguished). The *modus operandi* followed two main steps. First,

¹⁸⁹ See Max Kaser, *Römisches Privatrecht*, 282.

¹⁹⁰ Otto Behrends, Rolf Knüttel, Berthold Kupisch and Hans H. Seiler, *Corpus iuris civilis, Die Institutionen*, 19.

¹⁹¹ “*Adoptio autem duibus modis fit, aut principali rescripto aut imperio magistratus. Imperatoris auctoritate adoptamus eos easve, qui quaeve sui iuris sunt. Quae species adoptionis dicitur adrogatio*” (Otto Behrends et al., *Corpus iuris civilis, Die Institutionen*, 18).

the adoptee was released from his natural father's *potestas*. Then, the natural father, the adopting father and a third party (mediator) met and the natural father sold his son *fiduciae causae* three times to the adoptive father or into civil bondage to an intermediary. The adoptive father, or the intermediary released the son twice (*manumissio vindicta*).¹⁹² After the third sale the natural father broke his *patria potestas* over his son. The adopted son then stood in *mancipii causa* to his adopter. Secondly, the adoptive father's acquisition of the new *potestas* over the adoptee was effected by the declaration of a magistrate. The parties approached the *imperio magistratus* (usually a praetor) so that the adopter could acquire *patria potestas* over the emancipated son. The adoptive father claimed the adopted son as his own and the third party (or the natural father) raised no objection. Hence, the praetor declared in accordance with the adopter's claim (*addictio*). Consequently, this practice of adoption was a relatively private matter. Involving only one individual (also females and slaves) as object of adoption, it could take place anywhere in the magistracy (unlike *adrogatio*).

Roman adoption was restricted by several notions. Only a male could adopt who was himself *sui iuris*, and who had neither a natural child nor the hope of begetting one. Women could not adopt because they could not possess the *patria potestas*. Furthermore, according to the maxim *adoptio naturam imitator*, the adopter had to be older than the adoptee (at least 18 years older,

¹⁹² See Max Kaser, *Römisches Privatrecht*, 283.

plena pubertas).¹⁹³ It was, as with Greek adoption, customary, but not compulsory to adopt a relative.¹⁹⁴

In Roman adoption, the adoptee had certain rights and duties. First of all, he had to perpetuate the family. Taking the full name of his adoptive father, the adopted son had the same status and privileges as a natural son¹⁹⁵, that is, "the adoptee's legal position and privileges were the same as that of a legitimate biological son."¹⁹⁶ According to *sui heredes*, the adoptee inherited the family estate. Roman adoption, therefore, changed every area of the adoptee's life. He had to break with his natural family, old debts were cancelled, and a new life with a new name and new relationships began.

¹⁹³ "Minorem natu non posse maiorem adoptare placet: adoptio enim naturam imitatur et promonstro est, ut maior sit filius quam pater. Debet itaque is, qui sibi per adrogationem vel adoptionem filium facit, plena pubertate, id est decem et octo annis praecedere" (Otto Behrends et al., *Corpus iuris civilis, Die Institutionen*, 19). Compare also: Rolf Knütel, "Skizzen zum römischen Adoptionsrecht: 'Plena pubertas', Annahme an Enkels Statt, Erhaltung der Mitgift".

¹⁹⁴ The most typical case of adoption was the adoption of relatives (see Mireille Corbier, "Constructing Kinship in Rome: Marriage and Divorce, Filiation and Adoption", in R. P. Saller and D. I. Kertzer, eds., *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present*, 142).

¹⁹⁵ "In plurimis autem causis adsimilatur is, qui adoptatus vel adrogatus est, ei qui ex legitimo matrimonio natus est" (Otto Behrends et al., *Corpus iuris civilis, Die Institutionen*, 20).

¹⁹⁶ Trevor J. Burke, "Pauline Adoption: A Sociological Approach", 123.

For our considerations it is not decisive which mode of adoption practice we assume behind Paul's application of *huiothesia*. However, the core element of the metaphor is evident: an adoptee is taken out of his previous *potestas*, and is placed into a new household, with a new *pater familias* and with new relationships and responsibilities. That is to say, as the adoptee in the Roman *adoptio* is transferred from the *potestas* of his natural father to a new father, so is the sinner transferred from the household of Satan into the family of God. This transfer, together with the inherent legal changes, is the pivotal element the metaphor signifies: God, instead of Satan, has now *potestas* over his adopted child. Consequently, the former "child of wrath" (Eph 2.2-3) has now no more obligations or responsibilities to his old father and slave driver, Satan, the "ruler of the realm of the air" (Eph 2.2). Like a Roman adoptee, the child of God has certain rights and responsibilities as well. The adopted child of God is legally an heir of God (Rom 8.17), it has a new name (Rev 2.17) and has to serve and honour its heavenly Father in gladness. In belonging to a new household, old debts (sins) are cancelled, and old relationships are broken. The adoptee has now new friends, even new brothers and sisters in Christ, as he belongs now to the family of God, to the church.

Hence, the changes affect all areas of his social life¹⁹⁷, as Burke notes: "Just as adoption in Roman society signified a break with old familial ties and a commitment to a new *familia*, so ... 'adoption' denoted a new allegiance or a *re-socialisation* by joining the new family of God."¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Compare Trevor J. Burke, "Pauline Adoption: A Sociological Approach", 123.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

Of course, one must not carry the metaphor too far, as every metaphor when overstretched will break at both ends. For instance, in Roman adoption, the *pater* adopted a son to supply his own needs, yet God has no such needs. He is infinitely blessed and satisfied in himself. Furthermore, in contrast to human adoption, the heavenly adoptive Father will never die – and his adopted children will for eternity remain his children. All things considered, the Pauline metaphor of adoption denotes the break with an old, evil family, and the entrance into a new, divine family with certain rights and privileges.

Judging from the preceding considerations, Paul had most likely the Roman adoption practice in mind when he used *huiothesia* as a spiritual metaphor.¹⁹⁹ Of course, adoption as a redemptive concept is firmly rooted in Old Testament promises, of which Paul was certainly aware. Thus, Paul did not “invent” adoption *ex nihilo*, rather it was clearly announced by Old Testament prophets (e.g. Hos 2.1). Ferguson’s comments are well-balanced: “The Roman legal metaphor which Paul borrowed from the world in which he lived admirably summarised the nature of the sonship unveiled by the Old Testament and

¹⁹⁹ James D. G. Dunn notes that “Paul had in mind the legal act of adoption by which a Roman citizen entered another family and came under the *patria potestas* of its head” (Dunn, quoted in Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family. Exploring a Pauline metaphor*, 89).

brought to fulfilment in Jesus Christ.”²⁰⁰ The Old Testament prospect of sonship is preparatory, whereas the New Testament redemptive adoption is summatory.

The Apostle Paul connects *huiiothesia* with central redemptive concepts (immanent to Pauline theology), namely the doctrine of predestination, the Spirit of sonship, and the future redemption of God’s sons and daughters. This section only serves as an introduction to the different concepts in connection with *huiiothesia*. Detailed discussion is reserved to a following chapter in which we will examine redemptive adoption systematically.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul connects *huiiothesia* with predestination – he writes: “he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will” (Eph 1.5). In the context of Ephesians 1, Paul makes clear that God, by his sovereign will, predestines individuals for adoption through Christ and to the glory of his name. The bond between foreordination and adoption is certainly significant. Calvin even tends to equate election with adoption, as we will see later.

Furthermore, Paul relates *huiiothesia* to the Spirit, emphasising that Spirit and sonship are inseparably combined. In Romans 8.15, Paul writes:

²⁰⁰ Sinclair B. Ferguson, “The Reformed Doctrine of Sonship”, in N. M. de S. Cameron and S. B. Ferguson, eds., *Pulpit & People - Essays in honour of William Still on his 75th birthday*, 85.

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” It is the Spirit of adoption who enables the child of God to relate to God as his Father and to approach him with the cry “*Abba*, Father”. The believer is also made conscious of his adoption through the Spirit of sonship, who confirms the reality of adoption.

Paul’s use of *huiiothesia* clearly points to an eschatological hope. The apostle shows that true sonship, as the ultimate goal for the elect, still lies in the future: “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8.23). Hence, redemptive adoption in its completeness is clearly an eschatological redemptive event – the whole creation “waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom 8.19). The elect are predestined “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8.29). Due to the inherent richness of these passages, we need to examine the eschatological aspects of redemptive adoption in a separate chapter.

Being the only New Testament writer to use the Greek term *huiiothesia* (the placing of a son, having the right of a son), Paul introduces a legal metaphor that needs to be translated to a spiritual context. This leads to the question whether to interpret *huiiothesia* against a Jewish/Old Testament or rather a Greco-Roman background. Our conclusion is that *huiiothesia* is embedded in a

Roman legislative background while being also rooted in Old Testament prophecies. A spiritual translation depicts the sinner as having been taken out of the evil household of Satan and placed under the *potestas* of God, the Father. Several judicial details of a Roman adoption procedure show metaphorical impact and can be translated to the spiritual process of redemptive adoption as described above.

Moreover, *huiiothesia* has to be interpreted in relation to other central elements in Paul's doctrine of redemption, such as the doctrine of predestination, the Spirit of sonship and the future redemption. It also becomes clear that the Pauline concept of adoption has to be observed from a Trinitarian point of view. It is the Father who elects, according to his will, through his Son Jesus Christ and who with the ministry of the Spirit testifies and bears witness to the adoption. As a Trinitarian viewpoint is imperative for a right understanding of redemptive adoption, we devote a whole chapter to the topic.

2.3 John's Gospel: Children of God

The Apostle John chose a different approach to redemptive adoption. Some scholars even avoid including John's concept in systematic theologies of adoption. Trumper for instance excludes John's approach in his latest exposition of adoption²⁰¹, arguing: "It is my contention, then, that Paul's adoption model should not be conflated or confused with the language of other NT au-

²⁰¹ Tim J. R. Trumper, "A Fresh Exposition of Adoption: I. An Outline", 61.

thors, as has generally been the case to date in the work of systematicians.”²⁰² Yet, such a narrow definition of adoption does not prove to be helpful for our endeavor. Rather, our aim is to get the whole picture, that is, redemptive adoption as comprising fatherhood, sonship, and new birth. Jonathan Edwards for example relates adoption with regeneration when he notes that “by adoption, though far off, [you will be reborn] by a spiritual generation.”²⁰³ Therefore, we assume that there are important points of contact between Paul and John regarding redemptive adoption.

Unlike Paul, John does not use the word “adoption”. Even though John touches the forensic facet of adoption to some extent, he lays the emphasis more on the transformational side of adoption. Evidently, John and Paul describe two aspects of the same reality, as we will see in the following discussion.

2.3.1 *Kindschaft*

The Apostle John speaks of children (*tekna*, τέκνα), rather than sons (like Paul, e.g. Gal 4.6: *huiot*, υἱοί). Unlike Paul, John never uses *huios* (υἱός) to describe humankind’s sonship – he reserves this term to denote Christ’s divine sonship (the only exception where John uses the term in relation to believers is in John 12.36: *υἱοὶ φωτός*). In contrast, Paul uses both terms for individuals. Paul uses *huios* to denote adopted sons and daughters of God, and *tekna* to identify human beings as children in an universal sense. Thus,

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁰³ Jonathan Edwards, *Of God the Father*, 153.

whereas Paul emphasises sonship (*Sohnschaft*), John accentuates *Kindschaft* (an equivalent would be the artificial word “childship”).

John the apostle identifies God’s love as the source of true *Kindschaft*: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1 John 3.1-2). God’s great love is the reason and fountain of *Kindschaft*, and the seal that the *Kindschaft* is true. The key text about the Christian’s *Kindschaft* is found in John 1.12-13: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Similar to Paul, the foreordaining will of God regarding sonship is evident. It is God, who decrees *Kindschaft* (John), or rather, adoption (Paul).

2.3.2 A judicial notion: The right to become a child of God

It is noticeable that John, like Paul, stresses the forensic, judicial aspect of adoption: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the *right* to become children of God” (John 1.12, emphasis added). Thus, everyone, who receives and believes in Jesus (precondition), gets the right, the *exousia* (ἐξουσία) to become a child of God. This is clearly a statement about a legal procedure and status, as Marshall argues: “The picture is that of legitimation: by naming the child as his son, the father acknowledges that it is indeed his child.”²⁰⁴ However, while Paul speaks of becoming a *huios* through the

²⁰⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 170.

means of adoption, John stresses that one becomes a *teknon* by transformation and new birth. This transformational aspect in John, the combination of *Kindschaft* with a new birth, enriches Paul's concept.

2.3.3 The transformational aspect: "Born of God"

2.3.3.1 Divine begetting

To those who believed in Christ's name, who accepted Jesus Christ as savior, God gave the right to become children, to those, "who were born...of God" (John 1.13). To be born of God is therefore a *conditio sine qua non*, a necessary precondition for *Kindschaft*. One becomes a child of God only by divine begetting. "The high honor and glory of the sonship of God is attained solely through the birth of or from God, through believing in the name of the man called Jesus Christ"²⁰⁵, writes Luther. This regenerative aspect of *Kindschaft* is a recurrent theme in John. Whoever receives Christ, the Word, is born (again, John 3.7) into the heavenly family. Therefore, to be a child of God according to John means to be "born of God" (John 1.13; 1 John 2.2; 4.7,9; 5.4,18), to be born "of water and the Spirit" (John 3.5-8), or "from above." Through the process of being born, the believer becomes a child – Schillebeeckx calls it the "*ontological* model of being born from God."²⁰⁶ This divine begetting is part of a mysterious, supernatural process. In begetting the sinner anew, God creates a new, supernatural being.

²⁰⁵ Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 101.

²⁰⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, 468.

2.3.3.2 A supernatural being

In John 1.13, John contrasts human begetting with God's supernatural work of the new birth. That is exactly what Jesus taught Nicodemus in John 3. Thus, a child of God is neither born of natural descent, nor by human decision or volition. As no human being can bring about his own birth, the same is true for the spiritual sphere. The children of God are miraculously born *of God* and this supernatural work of God rules out every human contribution. As a result, the Christian is a new being, completely transformed (compare Paul's similar language in 2 Cor 5.17). Dodd calls the newborn Christian child "in some real sense a supernatural being"²⁰⁷, and Schillebeeckx speaks of a "'heavenly' spiritual nature" and a "spiritual mode of existence."²⁰⁸

2.3.3.3 Adoption and transformation

Incidentally, the transformational aspect of *Kindschaft* in John illustrates a major difference between divine, redemptive adoption and human adoption. When human parents adopt a child they cannot change either the genotype or the phenotype of the adopted child. But God can. Every child God adopts gets a new heart, a new nature. God puts his own seed in his children. Robert Caudlish explains that a human father can do much good for his adopted child, yet

that is all the love which a father can bestow in adopting a child, according to the usages of earth. But it is not all that our Father in heaven

²⁰⁷ Charles H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, 68.

²⁰⁸ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, 470.

bestows upon us, when we are called children of God... He begets us to himself... He must have us to be, not titular, but real and actual children; children by participation of nature as well as by deed of adoption.²⁰⁹

Thus, the newborn adopted child is in its proper nature a true child, born of God, begotten of the divine seed, and therefore partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet 1.4). Hengstenberg explains: "The conception of sonship rests on the spiritual generation, in which God, by an immediate operation, renders men conceived and born in sin partakers of the divine life."²¹⁰

Consequently, the regenerated child has new dispositions. The child purifies his life (1 John 3.3) and has a changed relationship to sin (John 3.6,9; 5.18; 1 John 5.18). Though there is still sin in the regenerate (1 John 1.8), God offers forgiveness (1 John 1.9; 2.2). The adopted child enjoys a new life: though he still sins, he is no longer under the dominion of sin, under the *potes-tas* of his old family, the devil (John 8.44). These changes are exclusively evoked by God. Through divine transformation, the sinner is changed gradually and partakes of God's nature.

²⁰⁹ Robert S. Candlish, *The First Epistle of John expounded in a Series of Lectures*, 211.

²¹⁰ Ernst W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, 89.

2.3.4 Be like him – The eschatological dimension of *Kind-schaft*

In First John 3.1-2, John connects the transformational side of *Kind-schaft* with an eschatological prospect: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.² Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” Verse 2 shows clearly a *Kindschaft* that is now hidden but is yet to be revealed. The latter is dependent on the *parousia* of Christ: “but we know that when he appears we shall be like him.” This construction raises questions, as the direction of the causality is less than obvious. One could undoubtedly deduce: “We will see Jesus as who he is, because we are transformed”, that is, perceiving is in this case caused by transformation (of the maxim: “like is known by like”). But, another inference can also be drawn: “We will be transformed, because we will see Jesus for who he is”, that is, transformation is caused by knowing, perceiving. While Dodd reckons it not important which solution is preferable (“It makes no important difference which of these two interpretations we adopt”²¹¹), the latter is more convincing in the light of Paul’s statement in Second Corinthians 3.18, which suggests the *dictum* “beholding is becoming.” Furthermore, and congruent with this assumption, it is credible that the vision of the glorified Christ will be the trigger for the Chris-

²¹¹ Charles H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, 71.

tian's full disclosure as the child of God. However we choose, the fact remains the same: The glorification as children of God is causally connected to Christ's *parousia*²¹²; "the more fully Christ is revealed, the closer will be their likeness to Him"²¹³, notes Brooke.

2.4 Conclusion

The Synoptic Gospels depict *Gotteskindschaft* as prerequisite to the entering of the kingdom of God. It is essentially Jesus Christ who mediates *Kindschaft* and the related privileges and responsibilities of the children of God. In comparison to Paul and John, the eschatological aspect of *Kindschaft* is less prevalent in the Synoptics.

While Paul introduces "adoption" and "sonship" as major idioms to convey the truth of redemptive adoption, John's terminology is characterised by the term *Kindschaft* (state of being a child of God) and the transformational aspect of being born of God. Yet, both Paul, and (surprisingly) John, employ judicial language in order to illustrate God's action towards individuals. According to John, believers have the legal right to be children of God when the precondition for this legal notion, the preceding regenerative act, is fulfilled. The sinner has to be born again in order to be raised to new life as a child of God. While John emphasizes a new birth, Paul contrasts an old man with a new creature that the child of God is in Christ. Thus, regeneration is accompanied by a spiritual (and legal) restoration of true *Kindschaft* that was destroyed

²¹² Compare also Paul in Colossians 3.4: "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

²¹³ Alan E. Brooke, *The Johannine Epistles*, 81.

by the fall. By begetting children anew, God fulfills the Old Testament promise in Hosea 1.10: "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people', it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God.'"

This transformational aspect of redemptive adoption is predominant in John and without parallel in any other New Testament author. Moreover, John's eschatological prospect is reminiscent of Paul's description in Romans 8 (17-23; compare also Phil 3.21; Col 3.4). The present wonder of being a child of God is nothing compared to the future revelation of the sons and daughters of God. If Christ, under the limitations of his human life had the power to raise dead people to life, to beget children out of darkness, how much greater and wider will the believer's transformation be when Christ reveals himself in full glory. We have now a foretaste of what it is like to be a child of God but the full revelation is yet to come: We will share in Jesus' glory, "we shall be like him."

Finally, John and Paul equally emphasize the importance of the Holy Spirit in sonship and resurrection – a more thoroughgoing exposition will follow in the next unit.

3. Redemptive adoption – A Systematic Approach I

Adoption is the authoritative transfer of a believer, by Jesus Christ, from the family of the world and Satan into the family of God with his being admitted into all the privileges and advantages of that family.²¹⁴

John Owen

3.1 Introduction

In the prior considerations we tried to highlight different approaches to redemptive adoption in the New Testament (Synoptics, Paul, and John). The following section sets itself the task of providing a systematic overview of the Christian doctrine, focusing on the essence of the foregoing. We regard redemptive adoption as rooted in the Trinity, and having judicial, transformational, and eschatological effects on the believer. The following chart serves as an illustration of the assumed relations and as a signpost to the direction of our systematisation.

²¹⁴ John Owen, *Communion with God*, 153.

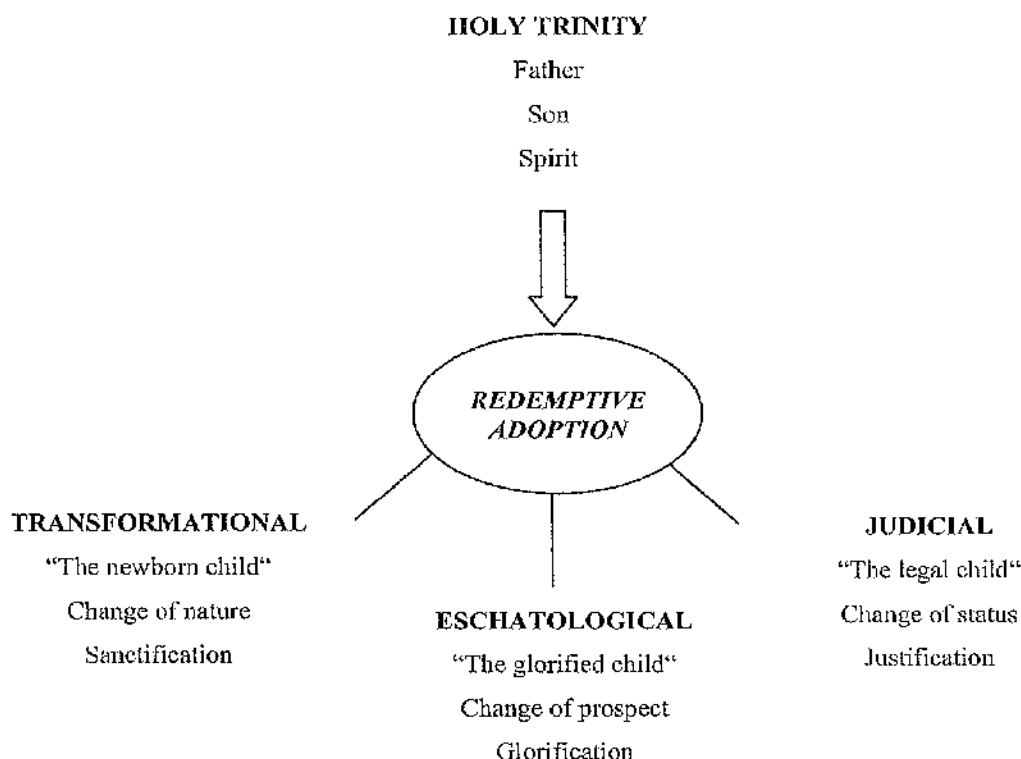


Figure: The work of the Trinity in redemptive adoption – with the effects on the adopted child of God (judicial, transformational, and eschatological).

3.2 The root of adoption: A Trinitarian dimension

Macleod is right when he states that we can understand adoption "properly only in the light of the Trinity."²¹⁵ Redemptive adoption has to be viewed from a Trinitarian angle. In redemptive adoption, we assume a strong interrelated activity between the divine agents. The Trinity acts *ad extra*, inso-

²¹⁵ Donald Macleod, *Shared Life - The Trinity and the Fellowship of God's people*,

far as the Father adopts through his Son Jesus Christ, sending his Spirit of adoption into the adopted child. In this context, the mutually revealing acts of Father and Son are to be emphasised. Though the Trinitarian works are somehow *indivisa per se*, the Apostle Paul points out how certain persons of the Godhead work distinctively. God, the Father elects (Eph 1.3-6), Jesus Christ redeems (Eph 1.7-12) and the Holy Spirit seals (Eph 1.13-14). Archibald Hodge notes accordingly: “This adoption proceeds according to the eternal purpose of the Father, upon the merits of the Son, and by the efficient agency of the Holy Ghost.”²¹⁶ And Sinclair Ferguson adds similarly: “The Father destines us to be his children; the Son comes to make us his brothers and sisters; the Spirit is sent as the Spirit of adoption to make us fully aware of our privileges.”²¹⁷ In the subsequent paragraphs, we will discuss the role of the divine agents in more detail:

3.2.1 The role of the Father: A gracious will

In adoption, God the Father is central, as Murray notes: “God becomes the Father of his own people by the act of adoption. It is specifically God the Father who is the agent of this act of grace.”²¹⁸ God’s love is the primal source of redemptive adoption. Sovereign grace is God’s motive in electing wayward children for adoption.

²¹⁶ Archibald A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 519.

²¹⁷ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, 4-5.

²¹⁸ John Murray, *Redemption - accomplished and applied*, 136.

3.2.1.1 God's love and grace

Adoption is rooted in God's love and in his eternal decree. Martyn Lloyd-Jones notes that "our adoption is the highest expression even of God's love."²¹⁹ In First John 3.1, God's love is identified as the main root of redemptive adoption. It has to be noted that God is not compelled to love. Though loving, God is not obliged to adopt sinners into his household. God's love is of a sovereign kind. It is a love that is only bound to his own name. God loves for his own name's sake, yet the human race is the focus, and the object and the beneficiary of God's love – the recipient of God's love receives grace.

Because God is love (1 John 4.16), he also decrees to love and to show love and mercy. God's love finds expression in the predestination of sinners unto adoption. Love flows through the channel of predestination, leading to redemptive adoption. Similarly, Calvin connects God's love and God's will in his commentary on Ephesians: "God's wonderful mercy shines forth, that the saving of our souls comes from God's free adoption, as its true and natural source."²²⁰ It is important to take a closer look at the nature of God's will regarding adoption.

3.2.1.2 God's will

God's eternal will is the effective cause of adoption, as Calvin notes: "no other cause makes us God's children but only his choice of us in him-

²¹⁹ David M. Lloyd-Jones, *God's ultimate Purpose - An Exposition of Ephesians 1:1 to 23*, 112.

²²⁰ John Calvin, *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians*, 4.

self.”²²¹ It is God’s will that brings about adoption (Eph 1.5), nothing in or because of the human subject. Calvin clarifies:

When he [Paul] says that God has predestined us by adoption, it is to show that if we be God’s children it is not through nature but through his pure grace. Now this pure grace is not in respect of anything that God foresaw in us ... but because he had marked us out beforehand and appointed us to such adoption, yes, even in such a way that the cause of it is not to be sought elsewhere than in himself. And that is the reason why St. Paul adds that he did it ‘in himself and according to the good pleasure of his will.’²²²

The necessary implication of God’s sovereign will is that the adopted child remains *de facto* passive. As in human adoption, it is up to the adoptive father to choose if, or whom, to adopt, while the adoptee has no influence on the adoption whatsoever.

While it is the Father who foreordains creatures to become his children, the election was made in Christ. The children of God are adopted through Christ (Eph 1.5) and it is God who decides to whom to reveal his Son (Matt 16.17) in order to bring about adoption. It is also the Father who sends the Holy Spirit into the hearts of his children. Therefore, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are “co-agents” in election and adoption. At this point, the dovetailing of election and adoption becomes apparent. Election works towards adoption –

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

²²² *Ibid.*

this is also the reason why Calvin almost equated election and adoption.²²³ In his sermons on Ephesians, for example, Calvin uses adoption interchangeably with election: “he had adopted us before we knew him and even before the world was created.”²²⁴

3.2.2 The role of the Son: Through Christ

Redemptive adoption is essentially christocentric. As mentioned above, adoption is only through Christ – Christ is central in the “process” of adoption. He is the Mediator: only through, by, and in him is adoption possible. Calvin notes in his commentary on Second Corinthians 1.20 that “the cause and root of adoption is Christ.”²²⁵

3.2.2.1 The Mediator restores sonship

It is only through Christ, the Mediator, that human beings can receive adoption (*διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* in Eph 1.5). Christ is the only door (John 10.9) through which one can have access to the Father (Eph 2.18) who is responsible for adoption. The reason for Christ’s incarnation was to fulfil his Father’s will to transfer a fallen people into sons and daughters of God (Gal 4.4-7). The only-begotten Son was sent by the Father in order to break the curse of the law and to offer life and sonship through his death and resurrection. As the second

²²³ Compare Howard Griffith, “‘The First Title of the Spirit’: Adoption in Calvin’s Soteriology”, 138.

²²⁴ John Calvin, *John Calvin’s Sermons on Ephesians*, 48.

²²⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, 137-138.

man, as the last Adam, the Messiah restores the fallen human race in establishing a new form of sonship. In dying a substitutionary death on the cross, Christ restored spiritual and legal sonship and provided a full redemptive sonship for everyone who believes. That is, Christ paid a ransom in order to ensure the implementation of adoption. In this light, Packer's language of "adoption through propitiation"²²⁶ seems appropriate. Calvin notes in this context that "the work to be performed by the Mediator was of no common description: being to restore us to the divine favour, so as to make us, instead of sons of men, sons of God... The only Son of God ... has adopted us as his brethren."²²⁷ As Mediator, Thomas Boston concludes, "the Lord Jesus presents unto the Father, the Adopter and Judge, the party to be adopted into his family."²²⁸

The sonship that Jesus mediates cannot be reduced to a mere re-establishment of pre-fall sonship. The new sonship through Christ entails much more, as James Orr notes: "It is the redemption of Christ alone which can restore the lost privilege of sonship. But Christ does not merely bring us back to the creation standing. He introduces us into the far higher, nobler, diviner relation to the Father."²²⁹ In our discussion of the eschatological prospect of sonship we will further examine this topic.

²²⁶ James I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 241.

²²⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 401 (II.xxii.2).

²²⁸ Thomas Boston, *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston*, Vol. 1, 621.

²²⁹ James Orr, *Sidelights on Christian Doctrine*, 158.

3.2.2.2 Sonship in union with Christ, through faith

The *Kindschaft* that Jesus mediates takes effect only in union with Christ. That is, the adoptee has to have communion with Christ in order to receive full spiritual and legal adoption. The union with Christ is conceptualised in a threefold way, consisting of a natural union (due to Christ's incarnation and his consequent community of nature with his brother and sisters), a spiritual union (by grace through faith, Christ as indwelling the child of God), and a federal union (with Christ as the head).

In orthodox Reformed and Lutheran circles, this union is also sometimes referred to as a *unio mystica*. Thus, the adoptee has to be in the *Christussphäre* in order to receive adoption. This union is mystical because it rests on God's unsearchable riches of grace and the mystery of grace itself.

The unifying element on the individual's side, if we can use such language, is faith (as a gift from God, Eph 2.8), issuing from election. It is faith in Jesus Christ (John 1,12-13; Gal 3.26) that unites the believer with Christ and consequently elicits and underlines adoption (Gal 3.25). This *fides specialis* is the instrumental cause: faith in Christ can be illustrated as the canal through which union with Christ and consequently adoption flows. In this sense it is true that *fides filios Dei facit*. Calvin points out that the God given faith is the guarantor, "the duplicate" of election/adoption.²³⁰ Therefore, faith is not a self-

²³⁰ "I said before that faith proceeds from election and is the fruit of it, which shows that the root is hidden within. Whosoever then believes is thereby assured that God has worked in him, and faith is, as it were, the duplicate copy that God gives us of the original of our adoption. God has his eternal counsel, and he always reserves to him-

evoked, psychological exertion, but rather a supernatural entity, attributable to God and validating the reality of adoption.

3.2.2.3 Union with Christ and divine privileges

Through being united with Christ, the adopted child enjoys special privileges *per se*. It is incomprehensible, yet factual, that adopted children (who are united with Christ) enjoy an intimate and unique relationship with their Brother and Lord. Bonhoeffer speaks in this context of the “*pro me* structure of the God-man Jesus Christ.”²³¹ “That Christ is *pro me* is not an historical or ontical statement, but an ontological one. That is, Christ can never be thought of in his being in himself, but only in his relationship to me.”²³² Bonhoeffer reminds us clearly not to underestimate the ontological aspect of our relationship with Christ. To be with Christ, to experience that Christ is *pro me*, is of inestimable worth itself. The child of God’s union with Christ leads to joy beyond comparison, as Jonathan Edwards states:

Christ, who is a divine person, by taking on him our nature, descends from the infinite distance and height above us, and is brought nigh to us; whereby we have advantage for the full enjoyment of him. And, on the other hand, we, by being in Christ a divine person, do as it were ascend up to God, through the infinite distance, and have hereby advan-

self the chief and original record of which he gives us a copy by faith.” (John Calvin, quoted in Howard Griffith, “‘The First Title of the Spirit’: Adoption in Calvin’s Soteriology”, 147).

²³¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, 47.

²³² *Ibid.*

tage for the full enjoyment of him also. This was the design of Christ, that he, and his Father, and his people, might all be united in one.²³³

All the divine privileges the adopted child enjoys flow from his union with Christ. First of all, through union with Christ, we are “restored to the likeness of the divine nature which we had lost by sin.”²³⁴ Through this unity, the child’s emotional capacities are renewed, as Kuyper points out: “God makes us partakers of the vital emotions of the divine nature, so far as our human capacities are able to experience them.”²³⁵ Adopted children are also promised an inheritance (Rom 8.17), a new name (Rev 3.12), and a crown of gold (Rev 4.4; 14.14). Everything the adoptee possesses he possesses in close association with Christ. Sons and daughters of God are called into the community of the Son. They have, like Jesus, the right to call God “*Abba*”, which is the ultimate expression of intimacy and love. Moreover, adopted children of God are also partakers of the same love that God has for his Son Christ (John 17.26).²³⁶ That is, adoption brings the Christian qualitatively into a new di-

²³³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1, 689.

²³⁴ Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, 333-334.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 334.

²³⁶ Jonathan Edwards writes: “By your being united to Christ, you will have a more glorious union with and enjoyment of God the Father, than otherwise could be. For hereby the saints’ relation to God becomes much nearer; they are the children of God in a higher manner than otherwise could be. For, being members of God’s own Son, they are in a sort partakers of his relation to the Father: they are not only sons of God by regeneration, but by a kind of communion in the sonship of the eternal Son... So

mension of relationship with God. Macleod clarifies: "In adoption, believers become sons and daughters of God, which means that they come to share in the very relationship with God enjoyed by Jesus."²³⁷ This is an amazing truth: the former unregenerate sinner enjoys, through adoption, by faith in and in union with Christ, the same relationship with God that Christ enjoys.²³⁸ Macleod even goes so far as to say that "the relationship itself is essentially the same."²³⁹

From this unity with Christ and shared relationship with God flow other benefits to the child of God. Adopted sons and daughters share the eternal Son's position and eminence (Gen 1.26; John 14.3; 2 Tim 2.11-12; Hebr

we being members of the Son, are partakers in our measure of the Father's love to the Son, and complacency in him." (Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1, 689).

²³⁷ Donald Macleod, *Shared Life - The Trinity and the Fellowship of God's people*, 86-87.

²³⁸ Nevertheless, there is a difference in the way we become children and Jesus is Son. A person becomes a child of God through regeneration whereas Jesus was eternally God's only begotten Son. Writes Smail: "It is he who in the uniqueness of his resurrection is designated the Son of God in power (Romans 1:4) while we are sons through an act of *huiothesia* (adoption, son-making) which Paul always relates to the ... finished work of Christ ... Thus the distinction between Jesus and us needs to be carefully observed. The language of incarnation belongs to him, and the language of adoption to us" (Thomas A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father*, 144).

²³⁹ Donald Macleod, *Shared Life - The Trinity and the Fellowship of God's people*, 86-87.

2.6-9). They are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8.17). Jesus' and the adoptee's destiny is the same (John 14.3; 17.24,22). As a consequence, the children of God will have bodies identical with the resurrection body of Christ (Phil 3.21). God will one day completely transform their characters and personalities into Christ's image (Rom 8.29). As the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* declares (answer 87): "The bodies of the just, by the Spirit of Christ, and by virtue of his resurrection as their head, shall be raised in power, spiritual, incorruptible, and made like to his glorious body."²⁴⁰

3.2.3 The role of the Spirit: The Spirit of adoption

Last, but not least, the Holy Spirit is a principal agent in redemptive adoption. Though the Spirit is also called the "Spirit of adoption", his involvement in adoption has been largely ignored. Yet, a lucid understanding of the Spirit's work in adoption is imperative, as Packer notes: "a recognition that the Spirit comes to us as the Spirit of adoption is the key thought for unlocking, and the focal thought for integrating, all that the New Testament tells us about his ministry to Christians."²⁴¹

The central locus that describes the role of the Holy Spirit in adoption is Romans 8.15-16: "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we

²⁴⁰ Westminster Assembly. *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English*, 84-85.

²⁴¹ James I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 249.

are children of God.” In the following, our aim is to discuss the main features of Paul’s concept one at a time.

3.2.2.1 The Spirit of adoption as sons

The question of what Paul intended to convey with the title “Spirit of adoption as sons” (*pneuma huiothesias*, πνεῦμα υἱοθεσίας) receives different answers from theologians.

Barrett speaks in an eschatological sense of “the Spirit who anticipates adoption.”²⁴² Von der Osten-Sacken suggests that it is about “a Spirit that causes sonship.”²⁴³ A similar view is provided by Cranfield who speaks of “the Spirit who brings about adoption.”²⁴⁴ There exists a causal relationship between the Spirit (as the agent of adoption) and the adoptee (as recipient of adoption). Consequently, there is no adoption without the Spirit and there is no Spirit without adoption, as Burke notes: “For Paul adoption and the Spirit are so closely connected they ought not to be separated; they are unitedly and reciprocally related.”²⁴⁵ Ridderbos writes similarly of a “reciprocity between the adoption as sons and the gift of the Spirit.”²⁴⁶ Every believer, having the Holy Spirit, is also adopted; and every adopted child possesses the Holy Spirit. Paul

²⁴² Charles K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 163.

²⁴³ Peter von der Osten-Sacken, *Römer 8 als Beispiel paulinischer Soteriologie*, author’s translation, 135.

²⁴⁴ Charles F.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 1, 397.

²⁴⁵ Trevor J. Burke, “Adoption and the Spirit in Romans 8”, 317.

²⁴⁶ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul - An Outline of His Theology*, 199.

the apostle communicates this confidence that a child of God has. The Spirit of adoption, as Murray notes, “is the filial disposition of confidence.”²⁴⁷ Instead of confidence, Bavinck prefers to speak of awareness: “By means of this Spirit we are made aware of our adoption.”²⁴⁸ It is exactly this confidence, or awareness, that prompts the children of God to address their Father with the cry “*Abba*, Father”.

3.2.3.2 “*Abba*, Father”

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the adopted child is able to cry “*Abba*, Father”. In recent decades, there has been considerable discussion about the invocation, “*Abba*, Father. Was *abba* used by little children? Does *abba* relate to today’s “daddy” or not? The question provoked a keen debate between James Barr and Joachim Jeremias.²⁴⁹ Barr doubted that *abba* could signify “daddy”. He argued that *abba* was rarely used²⁵⁰, and that it was by no means a children’s address²⁵¹ but rather used by adults.²⁵² Jeremias, in con-

²⁴⁷ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 295.

²⁴⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 465.

²⁴⁹ For a short summary compare: Mary R. D’Angelo, “‘Abba’ and ‘Father’: Imperial Theology and the Jesus Traditions”.

²⁵⁰ Writes Barr: “It is not clear that all cases of ‘Abba’ in the New Testament came from Jesus’ speech, or that Jesus in addressing his Father always used ‘Abba’.” (James Barr, “‘Abba, Father’ and the Familiarity of Jesus’ Speech”, 176).

²⁵¹ Barr notes that “‘Abba’ did not really belong to the speech of children.” (James Barr, “‘Abba, Father’ and the Familiarity of Jesus’ Speech”, 175). Barr further notes: “The Greek word used in the New Testament is always the adult word *patēr* and

trast, holds that *abba* was used more frequently by the Jews.²⁵³ He points out that *abba* was a well-known expression and therefore often used, especially by little children as babbling sound (*Lallwort*)²⁵⁴, comparable with daddy, but also by adults²⁵⁵ (though not in relation to God²⁵⁶): “Palestinian Judaism does

never a diminutive or a word that particularly belongs to the speech of children”

(James Barr, “‘Abba, Father’ and the Familiarity of Jesus’ Speech”, 176). He concludes: “But in any case it was not a childish expression comparable with ‘Daddy’: it was more a solemn responsible, adult address to a Father” (James Barr, “Abba isn’t ‘Daddy’”, 46).

²⁵² Writes Barr: “‘Abba’ was thus in normal use among adults” (James Barr, “‘Abba, Father’ and the Familiarity of Jesus’ Speech”, 175).

²⁵³ Jeremias sees an underlying *abba* in other verses. Moreover, Jeremias points out that *Ἀββὰ ὁ πατήρ* was widespread in the early church – as an echo of Jesus’ prayer. Therefore, Jeremias suggests that “*ʾabbā* underlies every instance of *πάτερ (μου)* or *ὁ πατήρ* in his words of prayer” (Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 65).

²⁵⁴ Writes Jeremias: “In origin, *ʾabbā* is a babbling sound... When a child experiences the taste of wheat (i.e. when it is weaned), it learns to say *ʾabbā*”²⁵⁴ (Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 66). Hendriksen agrees here with Jeremias: “A form of the word Abba, meaning ‘father’, was originally used by small children... In this word filial tenderness, trust, and love find their combined expression” (William Hendriksen, *Romans*, Vol. 1, 259).

²⁵⁵ Notes Jeremias: “By the time of Jesus, *ʾabbā* had long had a wider use than in the talk of small children. Even grown-up children, sons as well as daughters, now ad-

not use *ʾabbā* as a form of address to God. It was a children's word, used in everyday talk, an expression of courtesy. It would have seemed disrespectful, indeed unthinkable, to the sensibilities of Jesus' contemporaries to address God with this familiar word."²⁵⁷ Only in New Testament times was *abba* introduced as an address to God, as Jeremias observes: "Jesus dared to use *ʾAbbā* as a form of address to God. This *ʾAbbā* is the *ipsissima vox Jesu*."²⁵⁸

When Paul writes to the Galatians: "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal 4.6), it becomes clear that the adopted child, enabled by the Spirit of God's Son, may cry "*Abba*" as Jesus himself did. Scott is right when he notes that believers

dressed their father as *ʾabbā*" (Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 66).

²⁵⁶ Writes Jeremias: "As we can learn from the Targum, Jews deliberately avoided applying the word *ʾabbā* to God even outside prayers" (Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 65). Michel agrees and notes that "this mode of address [Abba Father] in prayer derives from the language of the family circle; it does not occur in the charismatic circles in Judaism" (O. Michel, *NIDNTT*, Vol. 3, 639). Compare also Cranfield for a similar statement in Charles E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 1, 400).

²⁵⁷ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 66.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

“participate in the sonship of the messianic Son of God to such an extent that they address God with the *ipsissima verba* of the Son.”²⁵⁹

Jeremias pleads for the connotation of *abba* as “daddy.” Stein²⁶⁰, Lloyd-Jones²⁶¹, as well as Morris²⁶² support Jeremias’ analysis. Nevertheless, Jeremias does not understand *abba* in a superficial, degrading sense, but rather in a reverent and respectful manner (“Jesus regarded *abba* as a sacred Word.”²⁶³). Therefore, following Jeremias, *abba* denotes intimacy as well as respect: “Jesus’ use of *abba* expresses a special relationship with God ..., an expression of obedient trust but also at the same time a word of authority.”²⁶⁴ Considered from this perspective, Jeremias’ analysis seems more convincing, as it is more balanced than Barr’s “all-or-nothing” approach. It is also a question of one’s personal background and upbringing whether one would allow

²⁵⁹ See James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God - An exegetical investigation into the background of *huiothesia* in the Pauline corpus*, 182-183.

²⁶⁰ Stein notes: “It is evident ... that *abba* was the word of a toddler whose first words were ‘Daddy’ (*abba*) and ‘Mommy’ (*imma*)” (Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus’ Teaching*, 82).

²⁶¹ Compare David M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans - an Exposition of Chapter 8:5-17. The Sons of God*, 240.

²⁶² “The word is from the babbling of a little child (like “papa”) and is the familiar term used in the home” (Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 316).

²⁶³ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 68.

²⁶⁴ Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 62.

oneself to equate *abba* with today's daddy²⁶⁵, or if one prefers to stick to Father, or simply *abba*. Overall, we note that *abba* represents an invocation of intimacy, trust, reverence and respect.

This address represents an amazing privilege – enabled by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8.15), through Christ's Spirit (Gal 4.6), the child of God is encouraged to approach God as *abba*, a beloved and trustworthy Father.

3.2.3.3 An emotional cry

At this point, we should not disregard the important word “cry.” Adopted sons and daughters of God “cry” “*Abba*, Father”. In this sense, the Holy Spirit awakens emotions in the child of God towards the quality of the fatherhood of God. “*Abba*, Father” is not a stoical statement, but rather an emotional cry expressed by the adopted child. “The acknowledgment that God is our Father surely involved the emotions, for the experience of the Spirit in the earliest Christian communities was dynamic and vital. Acknowledgment of the Father was full of gladness and joy inexpressible”²⁶⁶, notes Schreiner. This is an important aspect of the work of the Spirit in the believer's heart. Yet, we must guard ourselves against the extremes: we reject the idea that “*Abba*, Father” intones a kind of ecstatic acclamation (as Bultmann suggests²⁶⁷). Barth argues in this context that

²⁶⁵ John MacArthur interprets *abba* as “Daddy or Papa” (see John F. MacArthur, *Ephesians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, 15).

²⁶⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 426.

²⁶⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, quoted in Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 227.

Ecstasies and illuminations, inspirations and intuitions, are not necessary. Happy are they who are worthy to receive them! But woe be to us, if we wait anxiously for them! Woe be to us, if we fail to recognize that they are patchwork by-products! All that occurs to us and in us can be no more than an answer to what the Spirit himself says. Only as this answer can the motions of our spirits be strong and true and living. The Spirit himself speaks beyond our strength and truth and life. That of which God speaks is immeasurably greater than the greatest of which our spirits can speak; for He speaks of our non-existent existence; He speaks of us as – His Children.²⁶⁸

Nevertheless, the “*Abba*, Father” cry is an intense cry from the *Gott-kind*’s heart. That is, the adoptee’s “awareness of God as Father comes not from rational consideration nor from external testimony alone but from a truth deeply felt and intensely experienced”²⁶⁹, argues Douglas Moo. Martin Luther notes that “*Abba*, Father” “is but a little word, and yet notwithstanding it comprehendeth all things... This little word ‘Father’, conceived effectually in the heart. It passeth all the eloquence of Demosthenes, Cicero, and of the most eloquent rhetoricians that ever were in the world.”²⁷⁰

Hence, an adopted child must never address its heavenly adoptive Father in a dispassionate manner – the emotions are meant to be involved. Thomas Chalmers writes: “I fear, that there are many ..., who could never allege

²⁶⁸ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 299.

²⁶⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 502.

²⁷⁰ Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 369-370.

of themselves at any time, that they had the spirit of adoption – with whom the sense of God as their reconciled Father, is as entirely a stranger to their heart as is any mystic inspiration – who have a kind of decent, and in some sort an earnest religiousness, but have never been visited by any feeling bald so sanguine or ecstatic as this.”²⁷¹

3.2.3.4 The witness of the Holy Spirit

Furthermore, Paul speaks of the Spirit, who “himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8.16). What did Paul have in mind? Are there two distinct (or related) witnesses, that is, the Holy Spirit and our human spirit? To whom are they bearing witness? How does the process of witnessing function?

First of all, we can exclude the improbable assumption that the two witnesses bear witness independently from each other. The Holy Spirit is superior to the human spirit. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that just one main witness, that is, the Holy Spirit, communicates to the human spirit.

Hendriksen points out that one could paraphrase Paul’s sentence also in this way: “The Spirit himself assures our spirit that we are children of God.”²⁷²

This rendering is probably the nearest to Paul’s intention. Similarly, Luther interprets in terms of an official recognition when he notes that the Spirit “certifieth our spirits that we are the children of God.”²⁷³ Moo²⁷⁴, as well as Cal-

²⁷¹ Thomas Chalmers, *Lectures on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 55.

²⁷² William Hendriksen, *Romans*, Vol. 1, 260.

²⁷³ Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 366.

vin²⁷⁵, employs a similar terminology. Therefore, we can think of the Spirit's witnessing work as imprinting his testimony on the children of God's hearts and minds. The Spirit testifies, that is, shows to be true, gives evidence in support of, informs, educates, and teaches the believer's spirit. The prefix (*συν*) of the compound verb (*συνμαρτυρεῖ*) indicates a togetherness. It emphasises a communication between the Spirit and the adoptee. Habermas writes accordingly: "Romans 8:16 characterizes the Holy Spirit's testimony as a personal, firsthand *communication with the believer's spirit*, informing the Christian of his familial relationship to God" (emphasis added).²⁷⁶ Karl Barth sums up this process as follows: "The Truth itself has proclaimed to us that Truth is Truth and that we originally participate in it."²⁷⁷ Barth comes close to the core insofar as the truth of redemptive adoption, and the Spirit's witness of it, is transcendent *per se*. Schreiner takes a similar mystical approach: "Ultimately the

²⁷⁴ Writes Moo: "Paul involves our own spirit in the very process of testifying to us that we are 'children of God'" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 504).

²⁷⁵ Calvin notes that "the Spirit of God affords us such a testimony that our spirit is assured of the adoption of God, when He is our Guide and Teacher. Our mind would not of its own accord convey this assurance to us, unless the testimony of the Spirit preceded it... While the Spirit testifies to us that we are the children of God, He at the same time pours this confidence into our hearts so that we dare invoke God as our Father" (John Calvin, quoted in Howard Griffith, "'The First Title of the Spirit': Adoption in Calvin's Soteriology", 148).

²⁷⁶ Gary R. Habermas, "The Personal Testimony Of The Holy Spirit To The Believer And Christian Apologetics", 54.

²⁷⁷ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 298.

text describes a religious experience that is ineffable, for the witness of the Holy Spirit with the human spirit that one is a child of God is mystical in the best sense of the word.”²⁷⁸ Yet, the Spirit’s work is also of a practical nature.

3.2.3.5 The enablement of the Holy Spirit

As the child’s mind is illuminated by and convinced of the truth of adoption, it will consequently demonstrate a changed behaviour, endowed with new attitudes as a true child of God. Through the Holy Spirit the adopted child is enabled to “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8.13). The child of God is perfectly righteous through Christ and its union with him. Yet, the child undergoes a process of sanctification that begins as soon as the child enters the new divine household. The children of God grow in grace and love, a continuous process effected by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit as the great enabler of mortification of sin is the dynamic of the child’s holiness on its way to heaven. We will discuss this important issue in more detail as we examine the transformational effects of redemptive adoption in the following chapter.

3.3 Conclusion

Redemptive adoption is no isolated work of one person of the God-head. Rather, redemptive adoption involves the whole Trinity: the Father, in electing and predestining children in love; the Son, as Mediator, in procuring regenerative sonship through propitiation, and inviting believers into unity with him through faith; the Spirit, as Spirit of adoption, in witnessing to the

²⁷⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 427.

child of God the mystical truth of adoption and enabling it to cry "*Abba*, Father" and to grow in holiness and grace.

4. Redemptive adoption – A Systematic Approach II

4.1 The effects of redemptive adoption

Having explored the Trinitarian involvement in redemptive adoption, we now turn to the effects that adoption has on the child of God. Taking our considerations regarding redemptive adoption in the Synoptics, Paul, and John as a starting point, we have identified three major factors that characterise redemptive adoption. First, adoption has a clear judicial distinctive (“The legal child”). Paul in particular contributes to our spiritual understanding of the legal attributes of adoption. Secondly, we highlight the transformational effects of adoption on the child of God (“The newborn child”). It is primarily the Apostle John who emphasises this restorative-regenerative fact. Finally, as redemptive adoption is to be completed in the age to come, we can identify a clearly eschatological prospect (“The glorified child”).

4.1.1 Judicial: “The legal child”

The process as well as the effects of adoption are describable in juristic terminology. The Roman adoption procedure serves as a model for the spiritual counterpart. The *huiiothesia* of the believer denotes the break with an evil

family and the beginning of a new life, with a new name and a new agenda in a new family. The *potestas* of the former evil father is broken: the *potestas* now belongs to God. The adopted child is free from the dominion of sin and is enabled to serve and glorify its new adoptive Father. Furthermore, the adopted child of God is equipped with certain rights and privileges as a legal member of the *familia Dei*.

4.1.1.1 The adoptive Father initiates adoption

Martin Luther observes two important issues – first, that there is a close relationship between the transformational and the judicial side of adoption, and secondly, that the adopted child is genuinely passive in adoption. He writes: “For he that is a son, must also be an heir: for by his birth he is worthy to be an heir. There is no work or merit that bringeth to him the inheritance, but his birth only: and so in obtaining the inheritance he is a mere patient, and not an agent.”²⁷⁹ That is, according to Luther, as we cannot give birth to ourselves, we cannot adopt ourselves either, we are but mere “patients”. God must take the initiative. Adoption comes from God. As in Roman adoption the adoptive father was responsible to initiate the adoption, it is God, the divine adoptive Father, who plans and executes adoption – God is the agent, not the individual. Haldane notes in this context that “the allusion to this custom reminds believers that they are not the children of God otherwise than by His free and voluntary election.”²⁸⁰ Adoption is always a sovereign and miracu-

²⁷⁹ Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 376.

²⁸⁰ Robert Haldane, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 357.

lous work of the Trinity, it is exclusively *ex parte Dei*, without any human contribution whatsoever.

4.1.1.2 Access to God through adoption

Through the adoptive act, the child of God has access to God. Before the adoption, the child lived in the darkness of its evil ruler. But God drew the child out of this evil household. And now the child of God has access to God – access that was unknown and denied before. Karl Barth summarises this right of accessibility like this: “the right of a son in relation to God as God has the right of a Father in relation to him – the right to a being with Him, the right to immediate access to Him, the right to call upon Him, the right to rely upon Him, the right to expect and to ask of Him everything that he needs.”²⁸¹

Through adoption, the believer has the right of access to God. Any of God’s children may go directly and with boldness to the throne of grace, crying “*Abba*, Father”. The child has the right to say anything that is important to him. Sons and daughters of God approach God with all the trivia of a childlike life. From an adult perspective, the affairs of children might be unimportant, but the heavenly Father loves to hear his children’s trivia. And through Jesus Christ, God’s children have an unrestricted and unreserved access to God (Eph 2.18). Adopted children experience an “ontological relationship”²⁸² with their heavenly Father.

²⁸¹ Karl Barth, *CD IV/1*, 600.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 599.

4.1.1.3 Children bear their Father's name

Another legal aspect of redemptive adoption consists in the fact that God puts his name on his adopted children. The children of God are called after God, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph 3.15). God's children have his name placed upon them. This is not just a formal labeling process, but the act of a Creator regarding his creation, as Peter O'Brien notes: "So for God to give creatures a name was not simply to provide them with a label, but signifies his bringing them into existence, exercising dominion over them."²⁸³ God's sons and daughters are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens and members of the household of God (Eph 2.19). This bearing of God's name and image is obscured by character and demeanour, by circumstances of life in a fallen world, but it is nevertheless the present reality that God's children are indeed his children and are called after his name. They shall all appear before the Judgement seat and God will acquit them, for they are legally adopted and made righteous through Christ.

4.1.1.4 A new family – the congregational aspect

Through adoption, the child now legally belongs to a new family, the family of God. Sons and daughters of God have God as their loving and divine parent and Christ as their brother, who understands and has compassion on them (Rom 8.17,29; Heb 2.11). It is important for the adopted child to realise that it has other brothers and sisters who all bear God's name. This is the

²⁸³ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 256.

foundation of Christian unity, as Donald Macleod points out.²⁸⁴ It is not church order, liturgy, denominational affiliation, or doctrine that is decisive. Instead the ecumenical foundation is the simple fact that all believers are equally adopted and belong to the same family. *Gotteskinder* are born, or as Burke notes, incorporated²⁸⁵ into the church. That is, all those whom God has adopted as children form one family, the household of believers (Gal 6.10), and they are obligated to show respect and treat each other in dignity and humility. This is what Ridderbos calls the “congregational aspect of the adoption as sons.”²⁸⁶

4.1.1.5 Adopted children are heirs and share in suffering

In Roman adoption, the inheritance was linked with the death of the adoptive father. That is, only after the adoptive father’s death could the adopted son inherit the estate. Although the divine adoptive Father will never die, for he alone is immortal (1 Tim 6.16), the Mediator died – in order to procure an inheritance for all who are through faith united with Christ. As Christ alone is the “heir of all things” (Heb 1.2), his little brothers and sisters become “joint-heirs” with him (Rom 8.17). God’s children are described as heirs of righteousness (Heb 11.7), as heirs of salvation (Heb 1.14), and as heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3.7).

²⁸⁴ Donald Macleod, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Free Church College. Edinburgh, 2005.

²⁸⁵ Trevor Burke, *Pauline Adoption: A Sociological Approach*, 129.

²⁸⁶ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul - An Outline of His Theology*, 201.

Since Christ, the divine testator, died, the adopted child already enjoys the inheritance now. Nevertheless, they live in an “already-not-yet” tension. The full inheritance (which is God himself, as we will discuss later on), is yet to come. The children of God wait for an “inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” (1 Pet 1.4). The only prerequisite, to come into the inheritance, is suffering (Rom 8.17b).

Suffering is a necessary precondition for the paying out of the full inheritance in eternity. It is remarkable and should never be forgotten that suffering belongs to the life of a child of God in this fallen world. Nevertheless, the heavenly Father promises that the affliction is temporary and small in comparison to the “eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4.17). “The sufferings are small and of short duration, and concern the body only; but the glory is rich and great, and concerns the soul, and is eternal”²⁸⁷, writes Matthew Henry.

4.1.1.6 Provision and Care

God treats his adopted children as if they were his natural children. Every need of the adopted child is met. Psalm 23 speaks in a beautiful manner of the divine provision for God’s sons and daughters. God as the good shepherd nourishes his child (v.2), restores the soul (v.3) and gives comfort (v.4). God anoints his child with oil and its cup overflows (v.5). The good shepherd is the giver of good gifts, that is, he withholds things that would harm his children. In Matthew 7, Jesus explains that his disciples will experience divine

²⁸⁷ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's commentary*, 570.

provision: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (v.7), even before they open their mouth to ask (Matt 6.8). Moreover, Christ makes it clear that the divine Father is incomparably better and loving than a human father: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Matt 7.11). The divine adoptive Father gives according to his own riches of grace (Eph 2.7) and far beyond every childish imagination.

4.1.1.7 Protection

We have just emphasised that the adopted child lives in an “already-not-yet” tension. Though the child of God is (already) legally adopted and (already) lives in God’s household under God’s *potestas* and protection, its old father, the devil, still “prowls around like a roaring lion” (1 Pet 5.8), actively seeking to destroy, and to target the child’s mind, emotions and moods. In his High Priestly Prayer, Jesus asks God that he would keep his children from the evil one (John 17.15). The Apostle Peter writes that God’s children are, by God’s power, being guarded through faith for salvation (1 Pet 1.5). And the Apostle Paul presents an armour against the attacks of the evil one (Eph 6.11-17). It is important to note that it is the “armour of God” (Eph 6.13), that is, it is God’s armour provided for his children. God, the Father, makes this armour available for his children. The child is not on its own, it receives protection from God. God provides protection from the wiles, and subtleties of the devil. With his rod and staff (Ps 23.4), he protects his children from the gates and the powers of hell, which are always planning their downfall. Jeremias notes that

“being a child brings everyday security.”²⁸⁸ God promises every one of his children: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Heb 13.5).

4.1.1.8 Assurance

According to Romans 8.29-30, the line between foreordination and the final glorification of the sons (and daughters) of God is uninterrupted. This is the rock solid basis of the child’s assurance of its adoption. God’s eternal and sovereign choice is the foundation of the *Annahme an Sohnes statt*. The child’s security is exclusively rooted in God’s sovereign will. As a guarantor the child receives the Holy Spirit, who bears witness to the factual reality of the adoption (Rom 8.14). Through the work of the Spirit of adoption, the adopted child is assured of its adoption, it has a “feeling knowledge”²⁸⁹, as James Packer renders it, that its adoption is real.

The elected children of God will persevere and enjoy eternal glory and happiness due to their Father’s love and guidance (Rom 8.37). In John 6.39, Christ assures his little brothers and sisters that it is God’s will that he would “lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.” Even “if a child wander from his father’s house, he will be sought and brought back again; so the children of God shall persevere in the state of grace”²⁹⁰, writes Thomas Boston. That is, even though the child of God is likely to experience backsliding, God will never forsake the child he adopted (Heb 13.5). James

²⁸⁸ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 182.

²⁸⁹ James I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 275.

²⁹⁰ Thomas Boston, *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston*, Vol. 1, 626-627.

Packer notes that “the family relationship must be an abiding one, lasting for ever. Perfect parents do not cast off their children. Christians may act the prodigal, but God will not cease to act the prodigal’s father.”²⁹¹

4.1.1.9 Freedom

The children of God also enjoy freedom. God’s children have the Holy Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor 3.17). Therefore, the children of God are required to stand firm in their freedom (Gal 5.1). Bavinck remarks that “the believer who is justified in Christ is the freest creature in the world.”²⁹² The former evil father has lost his *potestas* over the child, and no one and nothing has the right to command or enslave God’s children. John Owen notes in this context: “This authoritative transfer of believers from one family to another is done by the public declaration of the adopted person’s being set free from all obligations to the former family to which by nature he was related. This declaration is made to angels, to Satan and to the consciences of believers.”²⁹³ God treats his children not as slaves, but as grown up children (Rom 14.3.4). Consequently, they are free (Matt 17.26) and they no longer need the Mosaic code to regulate every detail of their lives. God’s children are freed from the moral law as means towards righteousness and acceptance before God (Gal 3.13; Heb 2.14-15). They are free from “an abject, slavish temper of obedience.”²⁹⁴ They fear neither condemnation nor

²⁹¹ James I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 254.

²⁹² Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 468.

²⁹³ John Owen, *Communion with God*, 155

²⁹⁴ John L. Girardeau, *Discussions of Theological Questions*, 492.

judgement. It is important that one child does not have the right to impose rules upon other members of the *familia Dei*. Every member of God's household is under the same *potestas* of God. It is not up to a child to judge other children.

4.1.1.10 New responsibilities

As soon as the children are adopted, they face also new responsibilities as family members in God's household. They owe their Father filial trust, love, honour, and obedience (1 Sam 15.22; Matt 5.48; 22.37; Heb 11.6). The children of God are required to glorify and imitate their heavenly Father (Matt 5.16; 6.9). Furthermore, they are requested to love all people, not only their brothers and sisters in Christ, who share with them in the adoption (John 13.34).

Packer notes that the "children must show the family likeness in their conduct."²⁹⁵ In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives his little brothers and sisters new boundary markers. The Beatitudes define the children of God. Children of God should be notable for their being free from anxiety, and their non-judgemental attitude. Adopted children are to be seen to walk in love (Eph 5.1-2), and light (Eph 5.8-11), ready to go the extra mile if necessary.

Now, it is important to note that these inclinations are wrought within the child by the Spirit. The result is an internal motivation within the child to comply with God's will. Adopted children are free from a slavish fear and are set free for a glad obedience, as John Owen writes: "The liberty of sons is in

²⁹⁵ James I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 238.

the inward spiritual freedom of their hearts gladly and willingly obeying God in everything.”²⁹⁶ We need to realise in this context that the indicative serves as the foundation for these imperatives. Paul’s logic works like this: Having written 11 chapters of massive theology and depth, he notes in Romans 12.1: “I appeal to you *therefore*, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (emphasis added). That is, the foundations of the ethical imperatives in Romans 12 are the facts (in particular justification by faith alone) of Romans 1-11. For only adopted children have the resources (the Holy Spirit) to put to death the deeds of the body, as Paul urges (Rom 8.13). As a result, it is a responsibility whose realisation is made possible by the Spirit of God.²⁹⁷ In the final analysis, the execution of the ethical imperative is essentially dependent on the Spirit’s sustaining and assisting work.

Taken together, we conclude that God has begotten his children anew so that they can walk in his ways. He transformed them and gave them a new

²⁹⁶ John Owen, *Communion with God*, 160.

²⁹⁷ Haldane summarizes: “It is through the power of the Holy Spirit, who testifies of Christ and His salvation, and according to the new nature which He communicates, that the believer mortifies his sinful propensities. It is not then of himself, of his own power or will, that he is able to do this... No man overcomes the corruptions of his heart but by the influence of the Spirit of God. Though it is the Spirit of God who enables us to mortify the deeds of the body, yet it is also said to be our own act. We do this through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in men according to the constitution that God has given them. The same work is, in one point of view, the work of God, and in another the work of man” (Robert Haldane, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 350).

heart. God enables his children to walk in the good works which he has prepared beforehand (Eph 2.10). This right understanding of its responsibilities leads the child to an internal rather than external motivation to fulfil its Father's will, gives glory to God, and excludes any boasting on the side of the child.

4.1.2 Transformational: "The newborn child"

Redemptive adoption contains a distinct transformational component. Many scholars, blinded by the judicial overtones of adoption, fail to recognise this important aspect. Reymond for instance notes that adoption is an action that is "forensically constituting and not subjectively transforming."²⁹⁸ This statement represents the classic overemphasis on the forensic facet of adoption at the expense of other important aspects such as the transformational. Yet, adoption is inseparably bound up with regenerative processes.

4.1.2.1 A new creature

In regeneration, God imparts to the sinner a "new heart" (Ezek 18.31; 36.26), a "new spirit" (Ezek 11.19; 18.31; 36.26), a "heart of flesh" (Ezek 11.19; 36.26), a "circumcised heart" (Deut 10.16; 30.6; Jer 4.4; 9.25; Ezek 44.7,9), and forms a "new creation" (2 Cor 5.17; Gal 6.15). The human being receives a holistic metamorphosis (compare also *Westminster Confession* 10,1). These regenerative, re-creative processes are connected with adoption, as Calvin points out in his *Institutes*: "But after the Lord has withdrawn the

²⁹⁸ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith*, 761.

sinner from the abyss of perdition, and set him apart for himself by means of adoption, having begotten him again and formed him to newness of life, he embraces him as a new creature, and bestows the gifts of his Spirit.”²⁹⁹ The adopted child is henceforth a new creature (2 Cor 5.17) – and “new” (*kainos*, *καίνος*) in the *Greek* implies “a new nature quite different from anything previously existing, not merely *recent*, which is expressed by a different *Greek* word.”³⁰⁰ It has to be understood “in the sense that what is old has become obsolete, and should be replaced by what is new.”³⁰¹

That is, God does not adopt like a human father adopts. When God adopts, he simultaneously changes his adopted child. The former sinner undergoes a complete regeneration – God’s adopted children are “re-begotten”³⁰², as Girardeau notes. God works a new birth. The adopted child has a new nature, with new attributes, longings, preferences, and motives. Barth refers to this new identity as his “unobservable, existential EGO.”³⁰³ In a way he is right, since for the adopted child the changes are not externally visible but only internally felt as they are implanted in the character.

²⁹⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 107 (III,xvii.5).

³⁰⁰ R. Jamieson, A.R. Fausset and D. Brown, *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (2 Cor 5.17).

³⁰¹ BAG, 395.

³⁰² John L. Girardeau, *Discussions of Theological Questions*, 431.

³⁰³ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 297.

4.1.2.2 New spiritual life

In redemptive adoption, spiritual life is being imparted to a spiritually dead person. God restores to the adopted child the spiritual sonship that was lost through Adam's fall. In the heart of the believing child there now shines a "divine and supernatural light", as Jonathan Edwards describes it.³⁰⁴ God conveys his divine light to the believer through his Holy Spirit. This light is "given immediately by God"³⁰⁵ as the "divine light" which enables the child of God to taste and see the beauty of its Father in the face of Jesus Christ (comp. 2 Cor 4.6) who mediated this new kind of spiritual sonship. Luther's language resembles Edwards' when he similarly compares God's work in the heart of the believer with "light": "The Holy Ghost is sent by the Word into the hearts of the believers ..., we receive an inward fervency and light, whereby we are changed and become new creatures; whereby also we receive a new judgment, new feelings and motions."³⁰⁶ Luther notes correctly that light changes "feelings and motions", that is, as a new light shines in the child of God, it realizes that old debts are cancelled, that the old life of slavery to self and sin has gone (Rom. 6.6-14; 2 Cor 5.16; Eph. 4.22; Col 3.9), and it rejoices in the Spirit.

³⁰⁴ Compare his well-known sermon about Matthew 16.17, *A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul By the Spirit of God, Shown to Be Both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine* (1734) in: M. Valery, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 17.

³⁰⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, 15.

³⁰⁶ Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 360.

4.1.2.3 Ongoing renewal

The transformation that God brings about in adopting is progressive as well as definitive. Transformation in redemptive adoption is an ongoing, continuous process. That is, on the one hand, God keeps on renewing the child of God, while on the other hand the adopted child is obligated to strive for renewal. As Paul encourages the readers of his letters to “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col 3.10) – “and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,”²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4.23). This progressive renewal is nourished by the beholding of Christ’s glory (2 Cor 3.18). In beholding Christ, the adopted child obtains renewal and change into the likeness of Christ – beholding is becoming. Ongoing renewal is therefore also God’s work as it implies the compliance of the adopted child. The child beholds Christ’s glory, yet at the end of the day it is God who transforms – the child is somewhat passively being transformed. The full completion of the transformation, when the child of God is perfected, shining in full glory, and completely Christ-like, still lies in the future. The eschatological prospect of *Kindschaft* is to be discussed in the following paragraph.

4.1.3 Eschatological: “The glorified child”

The doctrine of adoption has a clear eschatological slant. Through adoption, the child of God inherits a complete change of prospect: It awaits glorification instead of eternal damnation. The accent is on the “awaits”, that is, the eschatological *Kindschaft* still lies in the future, when the *basileia*

comes in power. Sons and daughters of God live in a fallen world and they still have to suffer, but there is also an eschatological hope. God's children anxiously wait for the great family gathering, the heavenly family banquet. As a guarantor of the reliability of this hope, the children of God have the Spirit of adoption who bears witness to them: the promised glorification of the children of God will come.

4.1.3.1 The "already-not-yet" tension

Only with the abolition of the present aeon will full sonship be inaugurated. The child of God is already assured of its adoption now, in the present, but the full unfolding of redemptive sonship still lies in the future. The true revelation of the sons and daughters of God will be fully visible and officially inaugurated in the *eschaton*. This describes the "already-not yet" tension of redemptive adoption. As Douglas Moo puts it, they are "'already' truly 'adopted' into God's family, with all its benefits and privileges, but 'not yet' recipients of the 'inheritance', by which we will be conformed to the glorious image of God's own Son."³⁰⁷ The present "phase" of adoption could therefore be described as an *adoptio imperfecta*. The full enjoyment of sonship is the Omega-point that is yet to come. One day, the adopted child will enter the promised land, the New Jerusalem: it will be at home, in paradise – as Count

³⁰⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 501.

Zinzendorf sings: "When from the dust of death I rise, to claim my mansion in the skies."³⁰⁸

4.1.3.2 Sharing Christ's suffering

Implicitly included in the already-not-yet tension is the reality of suffering. In this world, the children of God, as well as every human being, experience sickness, anxieties, daily tensions, burdens, losses, diseases, and catastrophes. The difference is that, unlike non-believers, the children of God suffer with Christ. Suffering is a necessary companion on the child's road to glorification. It is meant to be. The adopted child signs the receipt of its inheritance with suffering. Since Jesus, the elder brother, had effected adoption through suffering (Heb 2.10), he tells his disciples that everyone who intends to follow him must suffer with him as well. Sons and daughters of God are required to take up their crosses daily: "And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me'" (Luke 9.23). Therefore, adopted children share in the sufferings of their elder brother, they suffer for his sake: "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake" (Phil 1.29). The mystical union between Christ and his little sisters and brothers requires that they participate in his sufferings (though not literally in exactly the same quality and quantity of suffering). In order to participate (through union with Christ) in Christ's glory, the child of God must share in

³⁰⁸ Nikolaus L. Graf von Zinzendorf, quoted in Alexander Whyte, *A Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, 85.

his sufferings, as Paul makes plain in his letter to the Philippians: "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil 3.10). Dietrich Bonhoeffer, familiar with suffering, wrote from his prison cell in Tegel on July 21, 1944:

I discovered later, and I'm still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman... By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world – watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think is faith ..., and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Paper from Prison*, 369-370. The original German goes like this: "Später erfuhr ich und ich erfahre es bis zur Stunde, daß man erst in der vollen Diesseitigkeit des Lebens glauben lernt. Wenn man völlig darauf verzichtet hat, aus sich selbst etwas zu machen – sei es einen Heiligen oder einen bekehrten Sünder oder einen Kirchenmann ... – und dies nenne ich Diesseitigkeit, nämlich in der Fülle der Aufgaben, Fragen, Erfolge und Mißerfolge, Erfahrungen und Ratlosigkeit leben, - dann wirft man sich Gott ganz in die Arme, dann nimmt man nicht mehr die eigenen Leiden, sondern das Leiden Gottes in der Welt ernst, dann wacht man mit Christus in Gethsemane, und ich denke, das ist Glaube..., und so wird man ein Mensch, ein Christ" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung*, 195).

According to Bonhoeffer, God's children are to live in the *Diesseitigkeit* (this-worldliness) of life. They do not withdraw from the suffering in this world, but rather throw themselves in God's arms in the midst of suffering and thereby suffer with Christ through faith.

Nevertheless, God's children are sustained and comforted: "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too" (2 Cor 1.5). The children's earthly sufferings are only for "a little while", and after that they will experience restoration and strengthening (1 Pet 5.10). Those who endure have the promise that they will reign with Christ (2 Tim 2.12), and are told that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed" in them (Rom 8.18). There will be a great reward in heaven for those who suffer and bear their cross (Matt 5.12). Therefore, the children are encouraged to rejoice as they share Christ's sufferings, for they will see his glory, as the Apostle Peter writes: "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet 4.13). The promise of the future enjoyment of the grandeur of God's glory is the reason that enables the child to rejoice in suffering now. This is the motive that enabled the apostles to rejoice "that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5.41). Paul sums it up in 2 Corinthians: "as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything" (2 Cor 6.9).

4.1.3.3 Glorified bodies, reunited with the soul

In Romans 8.23, Paul connects the fulfillment of adoption with the redemption of the body. When God's children will receive their transformed bodies of glory, redemptive adoption is finally completed and the zenith of adoption is reached. The children of God have the sure hope that their lowly bodies will be transformed into Christ's "glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil 3.21). Christ will change the *schema* of their bodies. The new body of the child of God is not a new creation, but rather a transformation, a metamorphosis. The actual form of the body will be conformed to the body of Christ's glory. Christ's resurrection is the dynamic ontological principle of our resurrection. His body is the model that explains and defines for his little brothers and sisters the glory of their own resurrection body. They will be in the image of Christ, not only in a metaphysical – but also in a physical sense. The redeemed will receive immutable, indestructible bodies of glory, as Paul makes clear: "It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power" (1 Cor 15.43).

Another important fact has to be noted: In death, body and soul experience a traumatic separation. Though the soul can work without the body (angels exist without a body, God exists eternally without a body), this represents an abnormal, intermediate state (comp. 2 Cor 5.2). The bodies of the children of God who have passed from death to life will be reunited with their (already transformed) souls. As a result, the whole human organism as a psychosomatic

unit is being put together again. This is the Omega point of the redemptive act of Christ.

4.1.3.4 Sharing in the Trinity

As we have described earlier, the children of God receive immensely rich privileges and promises through their being united with Christ. The children of God gain insight into the nature of their heavenly Father. We assume that the child of God already has a glorified knowledge of the triune God in this life. Jenson notes, drawing from Aquinas: "God is knowable in that he actually knows himself, in the mutual life of Father, Son, and Spirit, which as personal is mutual acquaintance and understanding. He is then known by us in that this triune life is in its actuality a life with us."³¹⁰ Yet, the clearest view of the Father will be possible only in the *eschaton*. The children of God will one day see Christ face to face (1 Cor 13.12). "Utrum intellectus humanus possit pervenire ad vivendum Deum per essentiam"³¹¹, writes Aquinas, that is, the vision by which the child of God will one day see God in its essence is the same as the vision by which God sees himself.

The children of God do not only have the promise that they will see God. They will also be like him. By adoption through Christ, the child of God will reach, in its union with Christ, Christ-likeness in its utmost measure. The adopted child will be of one kind with Christ, completely glorified. Karl Barth emphasises: "The divine sonship of man is not his divinity. It is only ascribed

³¹⁰ Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune God, Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 228.

³¹¹ Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa Theologica*, Vol. 4, 1375.

to him, imparted to him, given to him. He is only received and adopted by God as his child. He is only instituted as such. But in it he belongs to God by a kinship of being."³¹² However, the adopted child will not be completely of the same essence as God himself, that is, it will not be essentially divine. As a creature, it will always be in the image of the Creator and never on the same level as him.

Nevertheless, the eminence that the child of God inherits will be extraordinary. Sons and daughters of God will share Jesus' eternal position and eminence (Gen 1.26; Heb 2.6-9) and they will reign with their elder brother (2 Tim 2.11-12; Rev 20.6). As humankind was made in God's image, God, in his plan of salvation, works towards the incorporation of individuals into the Trinity. "Man, made in the image of God, is also relational – male and female, in relation both to each other and to their Creator. The image of God is set in a context of relationality and communion of persons, to be realized eschatologically in Christ", explains Letham.³¹³ And Jonathan Edwards notes that the church, as God's daughter is admitted into the Trinity: "Christ has brought it to pass, that those whom the Father has given him should be brought into the household of God; that he and his Father, and his people, should be as one society, one family; that the church should be as it were admitted into the society of the blessed Trinity."³¹⁴

³¹² Karl Barth, *CD IV, I*, 600.

³¹³ Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity - in Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, 464.

³¹⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1, 689.

4.1.3.5 The future inheritance: God

“To have the forgiveness of sins and to be a child of God means to be one who awaits this inheritance and moves towards it”³¹⁵, says Karl Barth. Indeed, the children of God wait for their inheritance as reward (Col 3.24) and move steadily towards it. They have the Spirit of adoption as downpayment (2 Cor 5.5), yet still wait for the final glorification. It is God, the testator, who bequeaths their inheritance. Since Jesus Christ is the firstborn (Rom 8.29; Col 1.15; Heb 1.6), he is also the main heir and his little brothers and sisters are fellow-heirs. The children of God have an immensely rich testator: the one who has created and (therefore) owns the *kosmos*. The children of God will inherit (in Christ, together with Christ) a new name (Rev 2.17; 3.12), and a crown of gold (Rev 4.4; 14.14f). They will sit beside Christ on the throne (Rev 3.21), they will reign with him in the world to come (2 Tim 2.12, see also Rev 5.10; 22.5) and they will bear the image of the heavenly (1 Cor 15.49). God himself will be with them, and will be their God (Rev 21.3).

However, the most precious notion consists in the fact that they are not only heirs of what God has promised, but rather of God himself. Turretin rightly states: “This it is the inheritance of God himself, who (as he is the highest good) is often called our portion and inheritance ..., as believers are the portion and inheritance of God.”³¹⁶ The foundation for this view is apparent from Scripture. The Lord himself is the portion of the saints’ inheritance (Ps 16.5), writes the Psalmist. Jonathan Edwards comments that, “David,

³¹⁵ Karl Barth, *CD IV*, 604.

³¹⁶ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol. 2, 665.

throughout the book of Psalms, almost everywhere speaks without any hesitancy, and in the most positive manner, of God as his God glorying in him as his portion and heritage."³¹⁷ Through Ezekiel God promises: "This shall be their inheritance: I am their inheritance: and you shall give them no possession in Israel; I am their possession" (Ezek 44.28). That is, God is the believer's portion, inheritance and possession (comp. Num 18.20). Thomas R. Schreiner interprets "heirs of God" in Romans 8.17 as an objective genitive and argues: "the wording suggests not merely that believers are heirs of what God has promised ... but of God himself."³¹⁸ "God is the highest good of the reasonable creature"³¹⁹, states Edwards and he recommends the children of God to "rejoice in him [Christ] as their only righteousness and portion."³²⁰ "For the only true source of happiness is in the knowledge that God loves us and that we are his children"³²¹, writes John Calvin.

God is joy for the sons and daughters of God, because their Father is their peace, their portion, their desire, their all. Says Edwards again:

The redeemed have all their objective good in God. God himself is the great good which they are brought to the possession and enjoyment of by redemption. He is the highest good, and the sum of all that good

³¹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, 96.

³¹⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 427. Compare also Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family. Exploring a Pauline metaphor*, 98.

³¹⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, 244.

³²⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, 335.

³²¹ John Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians*, 17.

which Christ purchased. God is the inheritance of the saints; he is the portion of their souls. God is their wealth and treasure, their food, their life, their dwelling place, their ornament and diadem, and their everlasting honor and glory.³²²

The *Gotteskind*'s final and utmost inheritance therefore is God himself. The redeemed children of God are in union with Christ, predestined for adoption, awaiting their glorification, the resurrection of their bodies and the reception of their inheritance, namely God himself. God can give his children nothing and no one better or greater than himself. Only in their Father will the children of God find full satisfaction, joy and peace, as Edwards further states: "Offer a saint what you will, [but] if you deny him God, he will esteem himself miserable. God is the center of his desires; and as long as you keep his soul from its proper center, it will not be at rest."³²³ And as the children experience God as their greatest treasure, they glorify their Father in rejoicing in him. They will glorify God by enjoying him. In the end, therefore, adoption, like everything, is first and foremost for the glory of God (compare separate chapter). The whole purpose of redemptive history is the glory of God, the display of the Father's pre-eminence, radiance and beauty, for his glory and the enjoyment of his children.

³²² Jonathan Edwards, quoted in John Piper, *God is the Gospel - Meditations on God's Love as the Gift of Himself*, 145.

³²³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, 105.

4.2 Conclusion

Our considerations lead us to a definition that delineates redemptive adoption as the work of the triune God, effecting three main changes on the individual's side (judicial, transformational, eschatological). As discussed, redemptive adoption has its origin in the work of the Trinity. The agency of the Father comprises the predestination of sinners to divine *Kindschaft*, out of love. God adopts through the work of Christ, who mediates between the Father and his wayward children. The Spirit as the Spirit of adoption enables the child to address his Father as *abba*. As a guarantor, the Holy Spirit ensures the reality of adoption and enables the child to walk in God's ways.

In the present systematisation, we organised the effects of redemptive adoption under three main headings.

First, judicially, the child is legally adopted by its heavenly Father with all the privileges and responsibilities that entails. The child of God has entered legally into the family of God.

Secondly, the adopted child is a newborn child of God, it is a new creature with a new heart and new spiritual life. Sons and daughters of God undergo ongoing renewal until they are perfected in the *eschaton*.

Thirdly, the child is already adopted, yet not glorified. Sharing in Christ's sufferings on earth, the child awaits its glorification and full participation in the blessed Trinity.

5. Adoption in the *ordo salutis*

Adoption presents the new creature in his new relations – his new relations entered upon with a congenial heart, and his new life developing in a congenial home, and surrounded with those relations which foster its growth and crown it with blessedness. Justification effects only a change of relations. Regeneration and sanctification effect only inherent moral and spiritual states of soul. Adoption includes both. As set forth in Scripture, it embraces in one complex view the newly-regenerated creature in the new relations into which he is introduced by justification.³²⁴

Archibald A. Hodge

Theological history shows that it has always been difficult for theologians to assign adoption to the right place in the *ordo salutis*. Due to the past neglect of the doctrine, it is not surprising that adoption was often subsumed under justification, sometimes equated with regeneration and now and then it was negated altogether. This highlights a real difficulty. How can one possibly distinguish a doctrine as rich as adoption (with inherent judicial as well as

³²⁴ Archibald A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith - a Handbook of Christian Doctrine Expounding the Westminster Confession*, 192.

transformational elements), from similar conceptions like justification, or regeneration? As anticipated in the introductory chapter, the doctrine of redemptive adoption is an extremely wide-ranging doctrine. Adoption as an overarching theme touches many different levels of the *ordo salutis*. Redemptive adoption originates in the eternal decree of God, in his plan which existed before the foundation of the world. Its fulfilment began with the first coming of Christ, who procured sonship for everyone who believes, and it extends until the *parousia*, when the children of God will be glorified. Therefore, John Calvin was right in his broad view of adoption: „for Calvin, adoption into the family of God is synonymous with salvation“³²⁵, as Garret Wilterdink restates Calvin’s opinion.³²⁶ Calvin 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.”³²⁷

Nevertheless, in the following we will review different attempts to locate adoption in the *ordo salutis* in order to complete our picture of adoption.

³²⁵ Garret Wilterdink, quoted in Tim J. R. Trumper, “The Theological History of Adoption I: An Account”, 19.

³²⁶ Calvin writes: “Then what is the end of election, but just that, being adopted as sons by the heavenly Father, we may by his favour obtain salvation and immortality?” (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 244 (III.xxiv.5)).

³²⁷ John Calvin, quoted in Tim J. R. Trumper, “The Theological History of Adoption I: An Account”, 19.

5.1. Effectual calling towards adoption

5.1.1 God elects and calls

Although God calls through the Holy Spirit and Christ (Acts 16.14), the effectual call towards sonship is mainly the work of the Father. As John Murray notes, it is “God the Father specifically and by way of eminence who calls effectually by his grace.”³²⁸ The human being plays a subordinate role (“altogether passive”, *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 10,2), that is, effectual calling is monergistic, not synergistic. By means of effectual calling, God works sovereignly in the heart and mind of an individual in order to persuade and enable him to embrace Christ. When God calls, he calls successfully and efficaciously (Rom 8.30; 1 Cor 1.9; 2 Pet 1.10). God’s call has powerful effects because it is God who calls. When God speaks into a human heart “let there be light”, there will be light indeed (2 Cor 4.6).

Now, we have to note that God predestines “for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will” (Eph 1.5). Therefore, election works towards adoption, through Jesus Christ. God predestines his children to be conformed “to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8.29). Consequently, predestination has adoption as its supreme goal. God does not primarily predestine unto forgiveness, reconciliation or justification – God’s foremost objective in predestination is adoption, namely adoption to the praise of his glorious grace (comp. Eph 1.5-6). Calvin distinguishes between election and calling in view of adoption:

³²⁸ John Murray, *Redemption - accomplished and applied*, 90.

"Those therefore, whom God has chosen he adopts as sons, while he becomes to them a Father. By calling, moreover, he admits them to his family, and unites them to himself, that they may be one with him."³²⁹ Through the effectual call of God, therefore, the child of God comes into the full enjoyment of the Fatherly riches and blessings.

God calls insofar as he convicts the prodigal son of his spiritual need. God illuminates and renews. As the sinner does not call himself, neither does he illuminate or renew himself. God works regeneration by his word and his Spirit (Rom 1.16; Eph 2.1; 6.17; 1 Thess 1.5; 1 Pet 1.12).

5.1.2 God regenerates

The nature of redemptive adoption suggests an interweaving between the concepts of "adoption" and "regeneration". This has made it somewhat difficult for theologians to distinguish between the two.

Protestant Theology in general has tended to differentiate between regeneration and adoption. Girardeau points out that adoption must not be confounded with regeneration. In his *Discussion of Theological Questions*, he presents an extensive list of differences³³⁰, and observes that regeneration is a

³²⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 241 (III.xxiv.1).

³³⁰ Following Girardeau, regeneration is not conditioned upon faith, while adoption is; regeneration is a creative act, adoption is not; regeneration is a physical act, adoption is a legal act; regeneration is a real translation, adoption a formal translation; regeneration adapts us to our place in God's family, adoption formally introduces us into it; regeneration makes us God's children, adoption recognizes and treats us as his chil-

transformational act, while adoption is a legal act. Whaling agrees, showing that regeneration is by its nature creative – while adoption is legal, forensic.³³¹

Murray points to the additional element of a relational change in adoption in comparison to regeneration.³³² He establishes a causal relationship between the two, with regeneration being the necessary precondition for adoption.³³³ In contrast to Murray, Haldane favours the reverse direction in assuming adoption as predecessor of regeneration.³³⁴ In his *Systematic Theology*, Grudem restricts adoption to relational effects with judicial outcomes (“privileges”).³³⁵ In distinguishing adoption and regeneration, Grudem notes that, theoretically,

dren. Regeneration does not necessarily and of itself confirm us as children of God, adoption does, says Girardeau (John L. Girardeau, *Discussions of Theological Questions*, 473-476).

³³¹ Thornton Whaling, “Adoption”, 228-230.

³³² Writes Murray: “By regeneration we become members of God’s kingdom, by adoption we become members of God’s family” (John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 2, 229).

³³³ Murray notes that “regeneration is the prerequisite of adoption” (John Murray, *Redemption - accomplished and applied*, 133).

³³⁴ “After adoption comes our sonship by regeneration, not in the order of time, but of nature; for, being united to Christ, God forms in us His image, and this is the second way in which we are made the children of God” (Robert Haldane, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 357).

³³⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology - An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 738-739.

regeneration could be possible without adoption.³³⁶ This conception has its vagaries.

It is questionable whether this restricted view of adoption does justice to the inherent richness of the concept. Following Grudem, if God could regenerate without adopting, what kind of individual would be the outcome, if not a child? As a result, these somewhat classic conceptions raise further questions. Taken together, the common subdivision, with regeneration being transformational/organic, and adoption being legal/ relational, is too rigid to encompass all the biblical data.

Redemptive adoption cannot be confined to a relational, judicial change only. Rather, adoption is essentially connected with transformational processes. Trumper notes that "Roman adoption was, existentially, like a new birth."³³⁷

The Biblical evidence shows that when God, who is Father *essentialiter*, regenerates, he always regenerates towards sonship. This becomes evident mainly in John's Gospel, where to be "born of God" is clearly connected with sonship (John 1.13; 1 John 2.29; 4.7; 5.4,18). This means that we cannot view regeneration as separated from adoption, as Orr notes: "To the act of adoption corresponds the new nature received in regeneration, and the spirit of sonship bestowed on believers."³³⁸

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 738.

³³⁷ Tim J.R. Trumper, "A Fresh Exposition of Adoption: I. An Outline", 76.

³³⁸ James Orr, *Sidelights on Christian Doctrine*, 158.

Therefore, it seems more appropriate to conceive of adoption in a broader sense, that is, as a compound of transformational as well as judicial, and relational aspects. Archibald Hodge comes closest to the core of adoption when he considers adoption as a combination of both justification (a legal blessing) and regeneration (an organic blessing).³³⁹ Similarly, James Buchanan speaks of regeneration and adoption as “invariably combined”, “for no one is adopted legally, who is not also regenerated, or born from above.”³⁴⁰

Taken together, we note that adoption as a redemptive concept has transformational aspects and, as such, is perpetually connected with regeneration.

5.2 Adoption and justification

In the following, we will present three attempts to distinguish adoption and justification. We will discuss first, the classic view, considering adoption as a part of justification, secondly, adoption as equivalent to justification, and finally, adoption as distinct from justification.

5.2.1 Adoption as part of justification

In the Reformed tradition, adoption is often viewed as a part/effect of justification. In most “Systematic Theologies”, adoption eked out a lamentable

³³⁹ Compare Alexander A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 516.

³⁴⁰ James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification - An Outline of its History in The Church and of its Exposition from Scripture*, 275-276.

existence as a minor sub-section of justification. Turretin, for instance, views adoption as a "part" of, that is, "included" in justification.³⁴¹ Likewise, Charles Hodge considers adoption under justification,³⁴² and Berkhof notes that adoption is an element of justification. The last-mentioned distinguishes two elements in justification, one having a positive and the other a negative rudiment. The negative element, according to Berkhof, is the forgiveness of sins, and the positive element consists of two parts: "the adoption of children" and "the right to eternal life."³⁴³ Berkhof might have relied on Schleiermacher's conception, who defined adoption as the positive side of justification, the negative being the forgiveness of sins.³⁴⁴ Schleiermacher's conception proves to be quite confusing, when he adds at another place that "forgiveness and adoption are one and the same."³⁴⁵ Schleiermacher clearly plays down the importance of adoption when he observes that "it is equally true to assert that after a man is forgiven he is made a child of God, and that after he is received among God's children he obtains the forgiveness of sins."³⁴⁶

³⁴¹ "The other part of justification is adoption, or the bestowal of a right to life", writes Turretin and concludes that "adoption is included in justification" (Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol. 2, 665).

³⁴² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, 127-129.

³⁴³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 514-516.

³⁴⁴ Friedrich Schleiermacher, quoted in Wolhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, 212.

³⁴⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 517.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 499.

These, and related attempts fall short of the integral importance of the doctrine of adoption. As we will see in the next paragraphs, adoption is too extensive to be summarized under justification. John Calvin supports this analysis, as Griffith comments: "It appears proper to say that for Calvin, adoption is too fundamental a category to be subordinated to justification."³⁴⁷ Calvin's high view of adoption is apparent from his notion that "the gift of adoption ... bestows salvation entire."³⁴⁸

5.2.2 Adoption and justification as equivalents

Other traditions tried to equate the two concepts, adoption and justification. Though this is a step further towards the truth, it nevertheless does justice to neither adoption nor justification. As a prominent example, the *Council of Trent* identifies justification with adoption: "To become just and to be heir according to the hope of life everlasting' is one and the same thing."³⁴⁹ This position, of course, obscures both justification and adoption. A similar notion was propounded by Albrecht Ritschl who treated adoption and justification as equivalents (with the exception that adoption denotes additionally an eschato-

³⁴⁷ Howard Griffith, "'The First Title of the Spirit': Adoption in Calvin's Soteriology", 140.

³⁴⁸ John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, Vol. 3, 275.

³⁴⁹ J. F. Sollier, "Adoption", in C.G. Herbermann, E.A. Pace, C.B. Pallen, T.J. Shahan and J.J. Wynne, eds., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, 149.

logical prospect).³⁵⁰ Another German Protestant theologian, Willi Twisselmann, follows the same path, when he considers justification and adoption as two parallel constructs.³⁵¹

Naturally, there are striking similarities between the two concepts. Adoption is never separable from justification. The justified person is always the recipient of sonship, as Murray explains.³⁵² That is, being declared righteous is always connected with adoption. The adopted child is also the righteous child. Justification and adoption both include legal verdicts. Both change the legal standing of the sinner, both guarantee a right to inheritance, and both have eternal consequences. Nevertheless, adoption has to be differentiated from justification.

5.2.3 Adoption as distinct from justification

There are certain features that show the distinctiveness of adoption from justification. Candlish observes: "I am inclined to think that this view which I am attempting to explain of sonship, as not a part of justification, nor a mere corollary from it, but a distinct and separate benefit,—differently conferred, at least in some respects, and differently apprehended and realised,—

³⁵⁰ Albrecht Ritschl, quoted in Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, 212.

³⁵¹ Writes Twisselmann: "Rechtfertigung und υιοθεσία gehören zusammen, man kann sie als Parallelbegriffe bezeichnen" (Willi Twisselmann, *Die Gotteskindschaft Der Christen Nach Dem Neuen Testament*, 62).

³⁵² John Murray, *Redemption - accomplished and applied*, 132-133.

will be found to be of some practical importance.”³⁵³ On the one hand, Candlish is certainly right, yet on the other hand, he surprisingly plays down the judicial component of adoption:

I think it is of as much consequence to maintain the thoroughly un-forensic character of God’s act in adopting, as it is to maintain the strictly forensic character of his act in justifying. All is legal and judicial in the latter act; if it were not so, there would be no grace in it at all. Nothing is legal and judicial in the other; if there were anything of that sort in it, all its grace would be gone.³⁵⁴

This observation appears bizarre in the light of our foregoing discussions. John Gill comes nearer to the truth when he states that, “Adoption is a distinct thing from either justification or pardon. A subject may be acquitted by his sovereign from charges laid against him; and a criminal, convicted and condemned, may be pardoned, yet does not become his son; if adopted, and taken into his family, it must be by a distinct and fresh act of royal favour.”³⁵⁵ Adoption is indeed an act of a different quality from justification. It is, taken together, even a higher concept, as we shall examine in the final part:

³⁵³ Robert S. Candlish, *Fatherhood of God - Being the first course of the Cunningham Lectures*, 247.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 244.

³⁵⁵ John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity; or, A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, Vol. 2, 820.

5.2.4 Adoption as a higher concept (justification as a part of adoption)

It can be assumed that adoption is a more extensive concept than justification. Archibald Hodge views justification as precondition to adoption: Adoption "embraces in one complex view the newly-regenerated creature in the new relations into which he is introduced by justification."³⁵⁶ Likewise, James Thornwell notes that "Adoption is grounded in justification... Adoption, in other words, depends upon justification."³⁵⁷ Archibald Hodge links justification, sanctification and regeneration to adoption when he notes:

Adoption presents the new creature in his new relation; his new relations entered upon with a congenial heart, and his new life developing in a congenial home, and surrounded with those relations which foster its growth, and crown it with blessedness. Justification is wholly forensic, and concerns only relations, immunities, and rights. Regeneration and sanctification are wholly spiritual and moral, and concern only inherent qualities and states. Adoption comprehends the complex condition of the believer as at once the subject of both.³⁵⁸

Hodge accurately illustrates the comprehensive character of the doctrine of redemptive adoption. Similarly, Packer holds that adoption is a higher privilege than justification. He notes that justification is the "primary" and

³⁵⁶ Archibald A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith - a Handbook of Christian Doctrine Expounding the Westminster Confession*, 192.

³⁵⁷ James H. Thornwell, *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, 267.

³⁵⁸ Archibald A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 516.

“fundamental blessing, in the sense that everything else in our salvation assumes it, and rests on it – adoption included.”³⁵⁹ Adoption is a higher privilege because it involves a richer relationship with God. Packer views justification as a “forensic idea” and adoption as a “family idea”³⁶⁰: “To be right with God the judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the father is a greater.”³⁶¹ Correspondingly, Donald Macleod views adoption also as a judicial act, but attributes more features to adoption. Macleod explains that though adoption belongs to the same “forensic dimension” as justification, it is a much higher and more secure state than justification. Adoption, according to Macleod is “over and above justification.”³⁶²

As a résumé, adoption and justification are both forensic acts: both happen in the courtroom of God. In justification, God as a judge counts the sinner righteous through Christ. In adoption, God, as a Father legally adopts, and acquires *potestas* over the sinner and transfers him into his household. Macleod precisely and vividly depicts the elements of adoption that surpass justification: “The judge might say ‘You are free to go’, which is good. But God says: ‘I want you to go home with me, and you will be a member of my family, all I have is yours, my possessions, my power, my love etc.’” Justification by faith and grace alone is immensely precious and foundational. Though

³⁵⁹ James I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 232-233.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² I am indebted to Donald Macleod for some of the points adduced here (*Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Free Church College, Edinburgh, 2006).

acquittal and the imputation of Christ's righteousness are valuable beyond measure, adoption, and with it introduction into the household of God, is the essential goal of salvation. In this sense, adoption does more than justification.³⁶³ It is a "higher privilege" than that of justification, insofar as it is "being founded on a closer and more endearing relation."³⁶⁴ John Murray writes:

Too frequently it [adoption] has been regarded as simply an aspect of justification or as another way of stating the privilege conferred by regeneration. It is much more than either or both of these acts of grace. Justification means our acceptance with God as righteous and the bestowal of the title to everlasting life. Regeneration is the renewing of our hearts after the image of God. But these blessings in themselves, however precious they are, do not indicate what is conferred by the act of adoption. By adoption the redeemed become sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty; they are introduced into and given the privileges of God's family. Neither justification nor regeneration expresses precisely that.³⁶⁵

³⁶³ John L. Girardeau, *Discussions of Theological Questions*, 480.

³⁶⁴ James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification - An Outline of its History in The Church and of its Exposition from Scripture*, 277.

³⁶⁵ John Murray, *Redemption - accomplished and applied*, 132.

5.3 Adoption and sanctification

Redemptive adoption is related to sanctification. Through adoption, the child's character is being renewed, and step by step it has to accommodate to the right behaviour, suitable for a member of the household of God.

5.3.1 The old child is dead – made new

Through the regenerative metamorphosis, the old child died. The old child has died to sin (Rom 6.2; Col 3.3). This death is not of a progressive character, it is a singular death and not an ongoing experience. Paul clearly writes that the “old man” is crucified. That is, in our terms, we could say that the old child no longer exists (Rom 6.6).

However, Paul does not teach that the old nature has died. It is not the sinful disposition of the child that died, but the old, unregenerate man. The old man has been co-crucified with Christ, that is, the child that existed under the *potestas* of Satan no longer exists in this form. It is important to note that Paul does not say that the flesh has been crucified: rather is he speaking of the man. Accordingly, the child that used to be no longer exists. The child of God has taken off old filthy clothes and put on new garments. The unregenerate self, who was dead in trespasses, spiritually impotent, that old child ceased to exist. Paul expresses this psychological experience of being on the one hand dead, yet on the other hand alive in Christ: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the

flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2.20).

5.3.2 The absurdity of sin and the Spirit’s help

Consequently, since the adopted child has died to sin, it cannot sin. It cannot sin “for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God” (1 John 3.9). God’s children have received God’s seed. Therefore, they, essentially, cannot sin. Yet, the child of God keeps on sinning. The person that has God’s seed in him, sins.³⁶⁶ On the face of it, this seems absurd. This is exactly what John wants to express: the illogicality and absurdity of a sinning child of God. The perspective that John wants the child of God to adopt is the anomaly of a sinning child of God. Now, John knows of this anomaly and teaches that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1.9). Every child of God is responsible for ongoing mortification of sin. Thus, every child of God is required to continuously kill sin through the Spirit (Rom 6.6; 8.13; Col 3.5). Spirit baptism is closely linked to adoption. All of God’s children possess the Spirit (Gal 4.6) as the great assistant in sanctifica-

³⁶⁶ *Westminster Confession of Faith* (13,2) : “This sanctification extends to every part of the person, yet remains incomplete in this life. Some remnants of corruption still remain in every part causing within the person a continual and irreconcilable war,...” (Westminster Assembly. *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English*, 31).

tion.³⁶⁷ This experience is universal to the children of God, as it would be inconceivable that any of God's family should lack this Spirit. All of God's children are filled with the Spirit and are being sealed by the Spirit (Eph 1.13). Consequently one child cannot have "more" Spirit than another. No child lacks anything.

5.3.3 Ongoing renewal and growth

As we have noted earlier, the child is made new through regeneration. Thus, the children of God are living in newness of life. There exists a new self that was not there before. The new self has been raised by the power of God (Eph 4.22), and as a result, every child of God has now new resources, new aspirations, gifts and graces.

In the past, the child of God was spiritually impotent, but now it has the power of God in its life. The new child is a Spirit driven human being, it experienced a definite renewal and is now a holy subject, set apart, and dedicated to God (1 Cor 3.17). The child of God is now God's temple and it has to present its body as a living sacrifice (Rom 12.1). Though it still lives in the flesh, it lives by faith in the Son of God (Rom 6.4; 2 Cor 5.17; Gal 2.20; Eph 4.22; Col 3.10).

³⁶⁷ The *Westminster Confession* (13,3) reads: "the new nature overcomes through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ. And so the saints grow in grace, advancing constantly in holiness in the fear of God" (Westminster Assembly. *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English*, 31).

The child experiences ongoing renewal – this might sound paradoxical, but it is only a seeming paradox. God ordained the continuous renewal of his sons and daughters. There is no point (in this life) at which the child can say: “I have reached the moment of complete fullness and perfection”. God shapes the emotions, temperaments and characters of his children. As God continuously renews knowledge and mind, his children experience ongoing growth (Eph 4.15; 1 Pet 2.2; 2 Pet 3.18). Step by step, the children of God need to learn to speak truth in love, and to grow up unto him who is the head. God educates his children towards faith, love, humility, meekness, strength, zeal, wisdom, self-control, and contrition.

5.3.4 Son and Saint

When Jerome Zancius notes that “*plus est nos esse filios quam esse sanctos*”³⁶⁸, we have to interject that being both, son (daughter) and saint, is better, and also the destiny of the Christian. Sanctification is the process that develops spiritual sonship created by new birth until perfection at glorification. The legal part of the adoption procedure itself is completed through Christ’s obedience and atonement (Rom 8.16-17) and the child’s union with him. Nothing can be added to this legal status. One cannot be “more” child, or have a greater amount of sonship. One is either a justified child of God or the sinful slave of the devil. Therefore, adoption (as regeneration) does not have a progressive character, as sanctification does. In sanctification, as a progressive

³⁶⁸ Jerome Zancius, quoted in Alexander Whyte, *A Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, 87.

divine work, the adopted sons and daughters experience continuing education by their heavenly Father. Macleod notes that the adoptee learns “re-socialisation.”³⁶⁹ Nevertheless, adoption and sanctification belong together. All adopted children experience sanctification and everyone whom God sanctifies is also his child. There is no adoption without progressive sanctification; and no sanctification without previous adoption.

5.4 Adoption and glorification

Again, we are lead to the conclusion that redemptive adoption touches the whole range of the *ordo salutis*. Adoption is rooted in God’s eternal decree, flows through regeneration and justification, is a neighbour of sanctification and leads into the sea of glorification. Adoption and glorification are inseparably intertwined. All adopted children will experience glorification. And all those who will be glorified are God’s children. Hence, glorification is the outcome of the whole adoption process and concept. The aim of God in adoption is the glorification of his sons and daughters.

Gaffin is right when he reminds us of the close interconnection between resurrection and adoption in Paul’s letters. Gaffin writes that “adoption fulfills itself in the somatic transformation of resurrection.”³⁷⁰ Adopted chil-

³⁶⁹ Donald Macleod, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Free Church College, Edinburgh, 2006.

³⁷⁰ Richard B. Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption - a Study in Paul's Soteriology*, 119.

dren of God are always "sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20.36). That is, being a true son (daughter) of God is fundamentally connected with the resurrection. The absolute completion of adoption still lies – like glorification, in the future. In Romans 8.23, the completion of adoption in the future is compared with the redemption of the body: "we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." True adoption in its essence points to glorification, the redemption of the bodies of the children of God. Moreover, the children of God are "longing to put on" their "heavenly dwelling", (2 Cor 5.2), they are eagerly waiting (Rom 8.23), they live in an "already-not-yet" tension, as we have described earlier. Every believer is already a partaker of adoption. Yet, the full recognition as a *υἱός*, the entry into the inheritance, and the redemption of the body lies still ahead.

When, someday, God transforms his children's bodies into resurrection bodies, adoption will be completed and glorification consummated. The child of God is then raised in power and glory (1 Cor 15.43). God will conform the bodies of his adopted children to the body of Christ's glory, and they will be perfected in unity with Christ (Luke 23.43; John 17.24; 2 Cor 5.6-8; Phil 1.23). Shaw notes:

Then will Christ acknowledge them as his brethren before the assembled world, and put them in full possession of that inheritance which he has gone to prepare for them. Let them, therefore, look for his glorious appearing; and, in the meantime let them act in accordance with their high character and their exalted prospects – walking as the sons of

God, harmless and without rebuke, and shining as lights in the world.³⁷¹

Sons and daughters of God enthusiastically wait for the glory that awaits them and will be revealed in them. Their glory will reflect God as the glorious giver of this glory. Thus, the children of God are glorifying their Father now and ultimately in the age to come in perfection. As we consider this topic to be of primary importance in order to understand “redemptive adoption” properly, we dedicate the following, final chapter to this matter.

5.5 Conclusion

Adoption to the glory of God is central in the redemptive-historical process. “What blessedness can possibly supersede the blessedness of simply being a child of the holy God? There is none, not justification, not sanctification, however great these privileges are”³⁷², writes Reymond. Adoption to the glory of God is the omega point of the redeeming work of God. Redemptive adoption is overarching and extensive as it includes several important redemptive concepts.

Adoption is rooted in God’s effective call. God, as the heavenly Sovereign, elects, predestines, and calls sinners into his household and regenerates them into beloved children. This is a divine supernatural work, transcendent and only partially understandable by the child of God in this life. God calls

³⁷¹ Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith*, 141.

³⁷² Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith*, 761.

and transforms into Christ-likeness: the re-formation of the child into the *imago Christi* in the *eschaton*.³⁷³

It has to be noted that, in opposition to common conceptions, adoption is not to be subsumed under, or identified with justification. Though adoption, like justification, has inherent judicial aspects, it is a distinct, yet even higher concept (MacLeod) and privilege (Packer), as it follows justification and bestows royal favour (Gill), inheritance and glory.

Redemptive adoption has to be viewed in association with sanctification. With the act of adoption, the process of sanctification is simultaneously initiated: sanctification flows from adoption. As a result, the child of God experiences ongoing renewal. It is a child as well as a saint and eagerly awaits the full blessing of adoption: the resurrection of its body. This future glorification represents the omega point of adoption. The whole creation groans, expecting the revelation of the sons and daughters of God. The children of God are going to be clothed in Christ-likeness and will reflect the glory of their Creator and Saviour eternally.

³⁷³ Gaffin points out that justification, adoption, sanctification as well as glorification share a common "redemptive-historical, resurrection qualified origin." He insists that "these are not different acts but different facets of a single act" and views this single act as rooted in Christ's resurrection (Richard B. Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption - a Study in Paul's Soteriology*, 135-136).

6. Adoption to the glory of God

That if God himself be, in any respect, properly capable of being his own end in the creation of the world, then it is reasonable to suppose that he had respect to himself, as his last and highest end, in this work; because he is worthy in himself to be so, being infinitely the greatest and best of beings. All things else, with regard to worthiness, importance, and excellence, are perfectly as nothing in comparison of him. And therefore, if God has respect to things according to their nature and proportions, he must necessarily have the greatest respect to himself.³⁷⁴

Jonathan Edwards

Everything is to God's glory. God's own glory is the apex of all his work. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (2,1) reads: "There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection ..., working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will,

³⁷⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol.1, 97-98.

for his own glory."³⁷⁵ Consequently, redemptive adoption also serves to honor and glorify God.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes the purpose of God's gracious dealings with the human race clear: the praise of God's glorious grace:

In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ *to the praise of his glorious grace*, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace... ¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be *to the praise of his glory*. ¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, *to the praise of his glory* (Eph 1.4-7, 11-14, emphasis added).

It becomes evident that the final goal of everything God does is the praise of his own glory. These immense blessings, adoption included, are connected by a common purpose, namely the praise of God's glory. Sauer notes: "The fact of the redeemed's being sons of God within the framework of creation, is completely beyond all that contemporary thought can comprehend. For

³⁷⁵ Westminster Assembly. *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English*, 14.

all that, it is clearly taught in Scripture and it presents the highest unfolding of God's determination to glorify himself in love."³⁷⁶

Therefore, children of God are to glorify their Father: "As the Father looks on, blessed to see all his children safely home and enjoying the inheritance, so they in turn glorify him for all he is and for all the love and mercy he has bestowed on them"³⁷⁷, writes Trumper.

How do children glorify their heavenly Father? The children of God glorify God when they bow their knees before the Father (Eph 3.14) and ponder his greatness, behold his beauty, delight in his goodness, meditate on his wisdom, praise his majesty and proclaim: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Rev 4.8). They glorify their Father as they turn to him, rely upon him, trust him, obey him, acknowledge him as their Creator and Savior and, as they enjoy his grace and beauty. The children of God glorify their Father by enjoying him. They enjoy his ethereal beauty and glorify him thereby. Jonathan Edwards explains:

How hath he honoured us, in that he hath made us to glorify and enjoy him to all eternity; how are we dignified by our Maker, who hath made us for so high and excellent an end! He has made other creatures for his own glory, but they are passive in it... But God has made us actu-

³⁷⁶ Erich Sauer, *The King of the Earth - The Nobility of Man according to the Bible and Science*, 147.

³⁷⁷ Tim J. R. Trumper, "A Fresh Exposition of Adoption: I. An Outline.", 78.

ally to glorify, to behold his excellencies and to admire them, and to be made forever happy in the enjoyment of them.³⁷⁸

Sons and daughters of God glorify their Father as they find full enjoyment and satisfaction in him (and not in the world). Jenson draws attention to the fact that the children of God do not only glory in their Father, but in the whole Trinity: “our enjoyment of God is that we are taken into the triune singing”, writes Jenson.³⁷⁹ God is beauty, God is “a great *fugue*”³⁸⁰, and that evokes enjoyment in the child which reflects glory to God. I cannot provide a better summary than John Piper’s:

God adopted us in our unworthiness to make his grace look great. You were adopted for the praise of the glory of his grace. God’s action in adopting us is radically God-centered and God-exalting... We are adopted by God so that we will enjoy making much of God’s grace as our Father forever. We are adopted so that in this family the Father and the unique elder Son, Jesus Christ, will be the source and focus of all our joy. We are adopted ‘to the praise of the glory of his grace.’ It will take an eternity for the glory of that grace to be fully displayed for finite people. Therefore, we will be increasingly happy in God for ever and ever. That is the final meaning of adoption.³⁸¹

³⁷⁸ Jonathan Edwards, “God’s Excellencies”, in W.H. Kinnach, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 10, 427.

³⁷⁹ Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune God, Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 235.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 236.

³⁸¹ John Piper, “Predestined for Adoption to the Praise of His Glory”.

7. Concluding Remarks

We – God’s Children! Consider and bear in mind the vast unobservability, impossibility, and paradox of these words.³⁸²

Karl Barth

The doctrine of redemptive adoption is a central doctrine, notes John Owen: “the notion that we are children of God, his own sons and daughters, lies at the heart of all Christian theology, and is the mainspring of all Christian living.”³⁸³ Unfortunately, the doctrine of redemptive adoption does not hold a distinctive *locus* in the classic theological *corpus*. There is an urgent need to (re)discover the doctrine of adoption. As we have demonstrated earlier, throughout the history of Theology, the doctrine has been neglected. This thesis serves as but a small contribution to stimulate further research.

In our considerations, we first discussed the eternal fatherhood of God, showing that Jesus’ sonship is qualitatively different (eternally begotten) from that of adopted human beings (sonship through adoption). We then noted that whereas God is universally Father to all humankind through creation, he is Father salvifically only to those who believe (redemptive adoption). Thirdly,

³⁸² Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 299.

³⁸³ John Owen, quoted in Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, 5.

we examined God's fatherhood in relation to Israel and concluded that Theocratic adoption foreshadows redemptive adoption in the New Testament.

In what followed, we examined *Kindschaft* and the fatherhood of God in the Synoptics and then argued for an interpretation of *huiiothesia* against a Roman background in the Pauline corpus and distinguished Paul's approach from that of the Apostle John.

These preparatory considerations enabled us to construct a systematic approach. That is, redemptive adoption is foremost rooted in the agency of the Trinity. The Father (initiating adoption), the Son (adoption only through union with Christ) and the Holy Spirit (Spirit of adoption) work together towards adoption. The effects on the adopted child are threefold: judicial (the legal child), transformational (the newborn child), and eschatological (the glorified child, "already-not-yet" tension).

With this systematisation in mind, we were then able to organise adoption in the *ordo salutis*. Redemptive adoption as a comprehensive doctrine touches different aspects of the *ordo*, having judicial (justification), transformational (sanctification) and eschatological (glorification) qualities.

Finally, we concluded from Ephesians 1 that adoption is always to the praise of the glory of God. God is at the center, he is glorified in adopting sinners into his household.

Future research needs to focus on such well-known problems as the interpretation of *huiiothesia* in Paul, and the nuances of "*Abba*, Father". The Trinitarian as well as eschatological facet of adoption is still underdeveloped and deserves further attention. Redemptive adoption also has pastoral implica-

tions. Believers need to be taught who they are in Christ. They need to know what their privileges and responsibilities as members of the divine household are. They have to understand what it meant to be under the *potestas* of Satan – and now to be enjoying the loving care of the heavenly Father. The children of God need to understand, cognitively as well as emotionally, what adoption signifies in its judicial, transformational and eschatological consequences.

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