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THE THEOLOGICAL HISTORY OF ADOPTION
II: A RATIONALE

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> Why has the subject of Adoption – so rich and fertile in fine thought and
> feeling, so susceptible also of beautiful theological treatment – been so
> little investigated and illustrated? ... Certain it is... that a good treatise on
> Adoption – such as should at once do justice to the fine theology of the
> question, and to the precious import of the privilege – is a desideratum.
>
> Hugh Martin, *Christ's Presence in the Gospel History*

In the first of these articles[1] there was drawn a detailed sketch of the
theological history of adoption that covered the creeds, confessions and
relevant writings of the church. The purpose of the article was not only to
continue the small but growing chorus of those realising the historic
neglect of adoption, but also to document in the greatest detail to date
those resources that hold the key to the recovery of the doctrine.

It would be wrong to presume, however, that all who have followed the
argument so far are as impressed as I am by the evidence for the neglect of
adoption. Let those readers presently unconvinced (yet sufficiently
interested) undertake a personal perusal of the church's writings. In doing
so it will be seen how little there is of the familial tenor of Scripture and
how normative the omission of adoption has been from the theological
discourse of the church and the academy. How often, for instance,
theologians pass from the discussion of justification to that of
sanctification without any reference to adoption! This is especially
astonishing when seen in the works of Presbyterian, Congregationalist and
Baptist theologians familiar as they are no doubt with the order
justification, adoption, sanctification as found in the eleventh to thirteenth
chapters of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) (WCF),[2] the

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[1] Tim J. R. Trumper, 'The Theological History of Adoption, I: An Account',
    The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology 20 (2002), pp. 4-28.

[2] As also in the Shorter and Larger Catechisms. See Questions 33 to 36 of the

Savoy Declaration (1658) and the Baptist Confession (1689) respectively. Even where adoption is included in the discussion of soteriology, treatments of it often betray the fact that the church has invested little rigour in understanding the doctrine comparative to that expended in the formulation of other doctrines. Most commonly, it is assumed that New Testament authors other than Paul wrote of adoption – even though they do not use his distinctive term *huiothesia* (found only in Rom. 8: 15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). Moreover, in later Calvinistic treatments it is presumed that the doctrine is to be understood (often exclusively so) in terms of the application of salvation (*ordo salutis*) rather than its history (*historia salutis*).

Those readers unconvinced by the argument so far may also gain benefit from a contemplation of those reasons that may be proffered as an explication of the neglect of adoption. Although these could be variously enumerated and perhaps added to over time, what follows is the first attempt that we know of to draw together in any substantive way the major reasons why adoption's theological history has been as it has. I am indebted to those authors who have shared – albeit in passing – their insightful opinions on the matter, as will be evident. What is important here, however, is not the nature of the *rationale* but the fact that there is one at all. This puts the onus on those doubting the neglect of adoption to explain away the following historico-theological facts.

Accordingly, the purpose of this second article is to support the account already given of the doctrine's history. If it can be plausibly explained why adoption has not received the attention it was due then we may be able to lay finally to rest the alternative assumptions that either it has not been neglected or that the sparseness of literature on the subject merely reflects adoption's relative unimportance in Scripture.[3] With all this in mind, we now turn to what the evidence suggests are the two major reasons for the

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Shorter Catechism and Questions 69-75 of the Larger Catechism.

[3] I have raised this possible objection before. See 'The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation, I: The Adoption Metaphor in Biblical Usage', *SBET* 14 (1996), p. 131. There, and in the following article 'The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation, II: The Adoption Metaphor in Theological Usage', *SBET* 15 (1997), I sought to provide an answer by stressing (as the titles suggest) the metaphorical importance of adoption in Scripture and theology. In this series of articles, by contrast, the aim is to answer the same argument on the grounds that whatever the import of the doctrine there is solid evidence that points to the church's negligence in failing to expound it (*cf.* 'The Theological History of Adoption, I: An Account', p. 6.

neglect of adoption: The church's preoccupation with other disputed doctrines and the propensity of some of her theologians to turn a blind eye to adoption when found theologically convenient to do so.

(I) PREOCCUPATION WITH OTHER DISPUTED DOCTRINES

Consistently throughout ecclesiastical history, the church, in both her pre- and post-Reformation phases, has been so taken up with disputes involving doctrines other than adoption that there has been little time or inclination to shape a constructive formulation or exposition of the doctrine, let alone to integrate it fully into the theology of the church.

From the Fathers on there is evidence that this was the case. In the previous article we quoted Edward McKinlay's comment that 'The failure to consider, and adequately to develop along satisfactory lines, the doctrine of adoption, can be traced back to the early Fathers of the Church.' He continues: 'No doubt it can be plausibly argued, that the Fathers were preoccupied with questions of greater weight – questions of *real* grace, rather than questions about *relative* grace – questions such as the true nature of the Word made flesh, or the relations of the Trinity within the Godhead.'[4] Such seems to have been true, for example, of the Adoptionist controversy of the seventh and eighth centuries where discussions of christology stopped short of the soteriological implications to which they pointed.[5]

According to Louis Berkhof, Bishop Felix of Urgella, the real champion of the Adoptionist cause,

> regarded Christ as to His divine nature, that is the Logos, as the only begotten Son of God in the natural sense, but Christ on his [*sic*] human side as a Son of God by adoption. At the same time he sought to preserve the unity of the Person by stressing the fact that, from the time of his [*sic*]

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

[5]   K. R. Hagenbach, *A History of Christian Doctrines*, vol. 2, Clark's Foreign Theological Library, New Series, vol. 3 (Edinburgh, 1880), p. 267. See also R. Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte.* Zweite Hälfte: *Die Dogmengeschichte des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit* (Erlangen und Leipzig, 1898), pp. 13-15.

conception, the Son of Man was taken up into the unity of the Person of the Son of God.[6]

Felix's doctrine, Berkhof explains, was founded on a view of the distinction of Christ's two natures that implied a differentiation between each mode of sonship: the one supported by scriptural passages referring to Christ's inferiority before his Father, the other by the fact that the sons of God by adoption are called the brethren of Christ (Rom. 8:29). Urgella was successfully opposed, however, by Alcuin – the English monk and most prominent adviser to Charlemagne. In his later refutation of the errors of Adoptionism he reasoned that no father could have a son by both nature and adoption. This line of argument prevailed and Adoptionism was rejected at the Synod of Frankfurt in 794.

While necessary, the Synod's decision seems to have brought to an end all interest in the parallel notion of the believer's adoptive sonship. Regrettably the soteriological implications of the doctrine of Christ's Sonship were not followed up in the aftermath of the controversy. The pity of this is that the same issues were to emerge again much later during the 1860s' Candlish/Crawford debate of the Fatherhood of God. How their discussion of the connection between Christ's relation of Sonship and the believer's (whether by participation (Candlish) or analogy (Crawford)) could have benefited from earlier light on the matter![7] In the event, however, the Candlish/Crawford debate was just too historically detached to derive help from the Adoptionist controversy.

A more familiar example of the same phenomenon is found in the Protestant Reformation – one of three eras during which, according to John McIntyre, soteriology became the subject of substantive and protracted discussion.[8] With the exception of the Lord's Supper no doctrine came in for greater dissection at that time than that of justification, but the attention that it received was costly for adoption. As Candlish incisively put it:

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6 L. Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, reprint ed. (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA, 1985), p. 111.

7 For a lengthy summary of the debate see my doctoral dissertation, 'An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition' (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2001), ch. 8.

8 J. McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh, 1992), pp. 15-25. The eras he has in view are the Anselmic and Reformation eras, as well as the period stretching from the nineteenth into the twentieth century, 'the catalytic agent' of which was 'the ethicising of the attributes of God' (*ibid.*, p. 22).

> The Reformers had enough to do to vindicate 'the article of a standing or falling church' – justification by faith alone; to recover it out of the chaos of Popish error and superstition; and to reassert it in its right connection with the Doctrine of the Absolute Divine Sovereignty which Augustine had so well established. Their hands were full.[9]

Or, as Candlish's contemporary, the Scottish pastor-theologian Hugh Martin (1821-1885), similarly observed: 'On Justification by faith we have abundant and most precious authorship; for around that doctrine and privilege the great battle of controversy has raged. But the conquerors seem to have paused, exhausted or contented with the victory.'[10]

Certainly this was true for Luther. Although J. I. Packer makes the somewhat cavalier claim that 'Luther's grasp of adoption was as strong and clear as his grasp of justification',[11] J. Scott Lidgett comes closer to the truth when he notes that even when commenting on the *locus classicus* of adoption, Galatians 4:1-7, Luther deals more with redemption from the law than with the Fatherhood of God:

> Salvation is not conceived by Luther prevailingly under the form of realised and completed sonship, but as redemption, forgiveness, acceptance, confidence, and freedom, especially this last.... Luther speaks much here of the gift of the Spirit, of faith, of redemption, of freedom from the law of sin and death, of being heirs of God. All these blessings cluster for him around the gift of the Spirit of adoption. He speaks of the filial cry of believers, but he gives no exposition of the meaning of sonship, as the form, above all others, which the Christian life assumes. The freedom, confidence, and sense of heirship, which are so vital to Luther's experience and so closely consequent on sonship, engage his attention, rather than the nature of the relationship, which is their source.[12]

Similarly, the Scottish theologian William Cunningham was of the opinion that:

> Luther applied very fully the true scriptural doctrine of justification to all the corruptions of the papal system which were *directly* connected with it,

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9 R. S. Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God: Being the First Course of the Cunningham Lectures*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh, 1869), p. 192.

10 H. Martin, *Christ's Presence in the Gospel History*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 1865), p. 80fn.

11 J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 1975 ed. (London, 1988), p. 255.

12 J. Scott Lidgett, *The Fatherhood of God in Christian Truth and Life* (Edinburgh, 1902), pp. 251-2.

but he did not do much in the way of connecting the doctrine of justification with the other great doctrines of the Christian system.[13]

Writing more generally of Lutheranism, George Hendry is even more explicitly critical:

> There has sometimes been a tendency in Protestant theology, especially in the Lutheran Church, to lean too heavily on the doctrine of justification. This is understandable in view of the decisive importance of the doctrine at the Reformation. But the fullness of the gospel is too rich to be compressed into the framework of this doctrine alone. For when God extends his grace to us in Jesus Christ, he not only releases us from our guilt, he also receives us into his family; and the one thing cannot be separated from the other without the risk of serious misunderstanding. The doctrine of adoption is sufficiently important to merit treatment alongside the doctrine of justification.[14]

When we turn to Calvin the picture is more complicated. As alluded to in the previous article, Calvin has a most rich understanding of adoption.[15] In fact, it is fairly certain that he is *the* theologian of adoption. Notwithstanding, for whatever reasons (and they were probably theologically valid),[16] Calvin's decision (if conscious decision it was) to forego the discussion of adoption in a separate chapter or section of the *Institutes* was to have a lasting negative impact on the subsequent theology of later Calvinism. As it was the neglect of adoption between the mid-seventeenth and early-nineteenth centuries contributed to the later Calvinistic indifference to anything Calvin might have had to say of adoption, but such indifference was made easier by the obscurity of the pervasive manner in which he dealt with adoption. Even had they been interested in searching out Calvin's thoughts on adoption they would have been hampered from interpreting accurately his understanding of the relative importance of justification and adoption if their yardstick had been the bare

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[13] W. Cunningham, *The Reformers and Theology of the Reformation*, first published 1862 (Edinburgh, 1989), p. 337. *Cf.* S. B. Ferguson, 'The Reformed Doctrine of Sonship' in N. M. de S. Cameron and S. B. Ferguson (eds), *Pulpit and People: Essays in Honour of William Still on his 75th Birthday* (Edinburgh, 1986), p. 81.

[14] George S. Hendry, *The Westminster Confession for Today: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Richmond, VA, 1960), p. 141.

[15] See 'An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition', *op. cit.*, chs 1-4.

[16] The possible reasons I have discussed elsewhere (*ibid.*, pp. 42ff.).

fact that he devoted eight chapters of the *Institutes* to the explication of justification and none to adoption. With the renaissance in Calvin studies, however, we are learning that the ascertaining of the importance of a doctrine for Calvin is determined not by the number of chapters allotted to its discussion but how pervasively it is referred to throughout his work. When this is borne in mind doctrines such as union with Christ and adoption (which is one of its most colourful expressions) appear far more crucial to Calvin than a perusal of the contents page of the *Institutes* suggests.

Calvin's enthusiasm for adoption must not be allowed, however, to downplay the general Protestant soteric preoccupation with justification. While regrettable we must be fair and acknowledge that this myopia is understandable given the circumstances of the Reformation. Between 1530 and 1570 Protestants had to fight a tenacious rearguard action in defence of the *sola fide* nature of justification. They were united on the doctrine's three essential elements: First, that justification is a forensic doctrine entailing God's declaration of an individual as righteous in his sight, thereby granting him a change of status; second, that justifying righteousness, as it was called, is the alien righteousness of Christ external to man, but imputed to those who merely receive it by faith; and third, that the external act of justification is distinguished from sanctification or regeneration, which is the internal process of renewal within man.

Before long, however, the papacy convened the Council of Trent (1545-63). According to McGrath, the real significance of the resultant decrees lay in the amount of attention given over to a positive exposition of the Roman understanding of justification.[17] As is well known, it was agreed, *contra* to the Protestant position, that justification refers to the Christian existence in its totality and therefore includes regeneration and adoption; that is, the sinner's pardon and acceptance, as well as inner renewal. Significant for the present argument, however, is the fact that the anathematising of the Protestant understanding of justification kept the reformers and their successors alert to the need at least to emphasise if not defend the doctrine at all costs.

Later the Puritans inherited this defensive stance as can be seen from a comparison of chapters 11 ('Of Justification') and 12 ('Of Adoption') of the WCF. Whereas the Westminster Confession's chapter on justification runs to six paragraphs, the seminal chapter on adoption, being the shortest

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[17] Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification – From 1500 to the Present Day*, first published 1986 (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 69-86.

in the confession, has but one. The contrasting lengths of these chapters is explained not only by the amount of attention accorded the doctrine during the Reformation but also by the additional *via negativa* statements required arising from the controversies with Rome. Hence the relevance of Schaff's observation that creeds and confessions not only include that which is 'fundamental and sufficient', but also 'such points... as have been disputed'.[18]

While inheriting this defensive stance the Puritans also had cause to maintain it.[19] Whereas the reformers had fought against an external threat from Rome, the Puritans had to ward off challenges to the free grace of justification from within Protestantism itself. These came in the form of Arminianism and Neonomianism. By teaching that Christ's death accomplished merely the possibility of immunity from the payment of sin's penalty, Arminianism not only undermined the efficacy of the atonement, it also rejected the view that faith is wholly God's gift. In actuality, though, Arminianism was just too unsubtle to win over many Puritans. In any case, with the exception of John Goodwin they were without an able exponent.

Neonomianism, by contrast, had the advantage of Richard Baxter's patronage. Baxterianism, as Neonomianism was otherwise known, taught that God is the governor and the gospel a legal code. Whereas God enacts a new law by virtue of Christ's righteousness, it is the believer's righteousness that produces obedience to the new law through faith and repentance.[20] By teaching the necessity of a double righteousness Neonomianism sought to wrest justification from its grounding in Christ's imputed righteousness so as to prevent the doctrine from degenerating into Antinomianism.

The merit of Neonomianism came under close scrutiny in the protracted Crispian controversy of 1690-99. Beginning with Baxter's vehement written and spoken opposition to the republication of the said Antinomian

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18 *The Creeds of Christendom*, edited by P. Schaff and revised by D. S. Schaff, 6th ed. reprinted from the 1931 ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, 1990), vol. 1, p. 4.

19 In what follows I am indebted to J. I. Packer. He lists pride, spiritual frivolity, satanic hostility, natural religion, as well as aberrant theology as the bases of the fear-induced defensive mentality of the Puritans (*Among God's Giants: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, Eastbourne, 1991, pp. 196-9).

20 Under this scheme 'faith', explains Packer, 'is imputed for righteousness because it is real obedience to the gospel, which is God's new law' (*ibid.*, p. 207).

sermons of Tobias Crisp (1600-43) in 1689-90,[21] the acrimony and confusion created by the controversy succeeded in preoccupying Presbyterians and Congregationalists alike with issues germane to the Neonomian/Antinomian divide: regeneration and conversion, the nature of Christ's death and the imputation of his righteousness to the elect, the nature of the covenant of grace, the free offer of the gospel and the sins of the elect.[22]

Whatever light was given forth by the controversy, it is clear that heat was more in evidence, and although John Locke could surely speak for many in recalling how the controversy had led him 'into a stricter and more thorough inquiry into the question about justification',[23] the controversy neither resolved the broader issues nor did it further soteriological discussion beyond the realm of justification. Commenting wisely on the effect of the Crispian controversy and the general fractious spirit of the late seventeenth century, Toon writes:

> Harsh controversy always seems to have the unfortunate effect of forcing most contestants logically to develop their thought to conclusions which they really never intended to reach. If this is so, heated theological controversy (as against 'dialogue') is very dangerous; Biblical doctrine is not capable of being reduced into any finally neat and fully tidy system since it contains seemingly irreconcilable elements – *e.g.* predestination and free will. Any human, dogmatic, doctrinal system must of necessity emphasise certain Biblical doctrines to the virtual exclusion of, or inadequate reference to, others. Therefore, Christian charity should teach theologians to live peaceably with their brethren who hold different views.[24]

The controversies of the age explain, then, why it is that the Puritans generally did not accord adoption quite the focus it obtained in the Westminster Standards. In fact, the place of adoption in the Westminster documents has largely hidden from view its widespread disappearance from the theology of the later Westminster tradition. This point is worth making, for criticisms levelled against Westminster Calvinism because of its legal tone generally do not do justice to the distinction (which, granted, is one of degree) that may be made between Westminster Calvinism (that

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21 Peter Toon, *Puritans and Calvinism* (Swengel, PA, 1973), pp. 87-9.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 93-6.

23 Cited by Victor Nuovo in John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures*, reprint from 1794 ed. (Bristol, 1997), p. x.

24 Toon, *Puritans and Calvinism*, p. 100.

is, as found in the Standards) and Westminster theology (that is, as found in the trajectory of the tradition). Nonetheless, it is true to say that theologians of the Puritan era sent out signals relating to the importance of adoption as mixed as those of Calvin.

Meanwhile, such had been the preoccupation with justification that even when it was not being defended it so came to dominate Reformed soteriology that adoption was bound to suffer. Even those Puritans who allocated adoption a distinct *locus* in their theological work, for instance, nevertheless tended to deny the doctrine a distinctive meaning. Edward Morris notes, for example, that in the theologies of John Owen and Thomas Watson, adoption was 'not so much a separate or added benefit as an integral part or feature of justification itself – a presentation in the language of Owen, of the blessings of justification in new phases and relations; or in the phrase of Watson, a concomitant of justification'.[25]

No one contributed more to adoption's loss of a distinctive meaning, however, than the continental theologian Francis Turretin (1623-87).[26] Inquiring as to the nature of the adoption given *in* justification Turretin explains that adoption is but 'the other part of justification... or the bestowal of a right to life, flowing from Christ's righteousness, which acquired for us not only deliverance from death, but also a right to life by the adoption with which he endows us'.[27] This view, however, would not have had the impact it did were it not for the widespread and longlasting influence of Turretin's *Institutio Elencticae Theologiae* in Reformed

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[25] E. D. Morris, *Theology of the Westminster Symbols: A Commentary Historical, Doctrinal, Practical on the Confession of Faith and Catechisms and the Related Formularies of the Presbyterian Churches* (Columbus, OH, 1900), p. 450.

[26] 'The Reformed Doctrine of Sonship', *op. cit.*, p. 83; *cf.* Erroll Hulse, 'Recovering the Doctrine of Adoption', *Reformation Today* 105 (Sept.-Oct. 1988), p. 10.

[27] F. Turretin, *The Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. G. M. Giger and ed. J. T. Dennison Jr (Phillipsburg, NJ, 1994), p. 666. See also 'The Reformed Doctrine of Sonship', *op. cit.*, p. 83, and R. S. Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God*, p. 158. Thornton Whaling is incorrect then to say that 'Turretin recognizes the central place of adoption in the application of redemption' ('Adoption', *Princeton Theological Review* 21 (1923); p. 234). R. A. Webb on the other hand rightly claims that Turretin 'sinks [adoption] well-nigh out of sight' (*The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1947), p. 17).

universities and seminaries from the late seventeenth to the nineteenth century:[28]

> The majority of Reformed teachers followed their great textbook master in this sad omission, thus removing much of the central Biblical picture of family relationship from the theological curriculum. None can doubt that this narrowing down of the crucial relationship of redeemed humans to the Holy God into only forensic terms (crucial as the forensic element is to the Gospel) impacted the preaching of their students into a more legal, and less familial direction.[29]

No one followed the Genevan theologian on adoption more closely than the nineteenth-century Southern Presbyterian, Robert L. Dabney (1820-98). By Dabney's day justification had emerged from the heat of controversy and had been more positively expounded by Jonathan Edwards' sermons on justification by faith (1734) and by George Whitefield's evangelistic appeals to the masses to be right with God. Although a crucial biblical doctrine, it was the popular expositions of justification combined with the profile the doctrine gained in the preceding controversies that ensured the setting in stone of the soteric centrality of justification. Thus, by the time Dabney came to follow Turretin there appeared nothing unusual in his comparative dismissal of adoption.

In his 903-page volume on systematic theology Dabney has a mere 22 lines on the doctrine, which he justifies by reference to Turretin. Turretin, he argues, 'devotes only a brief separate discussion to it, and introduces it in the thesis in which he proves that justification is both pardon and acceptance'.[30] Ironically what Dabney was seemingly unaware of was that

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[28] Writing in 1881 Robert Duff observed that 'Turretin has been accepted for two centuries as an authoritative teacher in the Christian Church, and... the doctrines he defined and upheld are those which distinguish much of the evangelical theology of the present time' ('Theologians of the Past – Francis Turretin', *Catholic Presbyterian* 5 (Jan.-Jun. 1881), p. 372). *Cf. Reformed Theology in America*, ed. David F. Wells, vol. 3, Southern Reformed Theology, first published as part of *Reformed Theology in America: A History of its Modern Development*, Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985 (Grand Rapids, MI, 1989), pp. 19-20.

[29] Kelly, 'Adoption: An Undeveloped Heritage of the Westminster Standards', *Reformed Theological Review* (Australia) 50 (Sept.-Dec. 1993), p. 112.

[30] R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology: Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology Taught in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis, 1878; facsimile reprint ed., Edinburgh, 1985), p. 627. He also cites John Owen's position.

even as he was consenting to Turretin's underestimation of the importance of the adoption there were voices on both sides of the Atlantic calling for the end to such dismissals of the motif.[31]

In summarising the first reason for the neglect of adoption it is worth observing how appropriate it is that a motif that so readily highlights the importance of fraternal love has escaped the acrimony that has marred the discussion of other biblical doctrines. That said, we also recognise that doctrinal development regularly occurs in the cauldron of debate, for which reason it is not difficult to see how the development of adoption has been stunted by both the absence of the intense scrutiny that frequently accompanies controversy,[32] and the long-term shaping of the agenda subsequent to doctrinal disputation. The Southern Presbyterian, John L. Girardeau, made this point well:

> [The] subjective apprehension of objective truth may be increased in intensity, in scope and in adequacy. It is needless to observe that its growth, in the history of the church, has largely depended upon the challenge of acknowledged truth by errorists, by the conflict of theological views, and by the thorough-going discussion which has for these reasons been necessitated. In this way the church's knowledge of the doctrine of the Trinity, of sin, and of justification has been cleared up, matured and crystallized. To the precisely formulated statements of these truths it is not to be expected that much that is either novel or important will be added.
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> The same, however, is not true of the doctrine of adoption. It has not been made the subject of much controversy, nor has it received the didactic exposition which has been devoted to most of the other topics included in the theology of redemption. Its importance has been to a large extent overlooked, its place in a distinct and independent treatment of the

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[31] R. S. Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God*, p. 151.

[32] The same is generally true of the Fatherhood of God. Crawford writes: 'The Fatherhood of God, whether in relation to all men as His intelligent and moral creatures, or more particularly in relation to those who are "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus," has hitherto been in a remarkable degree exempted from the speculations and controversies of theology. No heresies of any note have ever arisen with respect to it. No schisms or bitter contentions have been occasioned by it. A comparatively small space has ordinarily been allotted to it in our articles of faith and systems of divinity' (*The Fatherhood of God considered in its general and special aspects and particularly in relation to the atonement with a review of recent speculations on the subject*, 2nd ed. revised and enlarged with a reply to the strictures of Dr Candlish (Edinburgh and London, 1867), p. 1; cf. p. 2).

covenant of grace has been refused, while leading theologians have differed in regard even to its nature and its office.[33]

In the light of this, 'ought it not rather to commend the subject of Adoption, that it may be treated apart from controversy? Certain it is', Martin continues, 'that a good treatise on Adoption – such as should at once do justice to the fine theology of the question, and to the precious import of the privilege – is a desideratum.'[34]

(II) THEOLOGICAL INCONVENIENCE

There is strong evidence to suggest, secondly, that the neglect of adoption is attributable to the way in which certain theologians have apparently turned a blind eye to the doctrine. This, of course, could not have been possible were it not for the fact that adoption has no secure place in theological discourse anyway. The omission of, say, justification or sanctification would be simply too obvious, for which reason the attempt itself is somewhat inconceivable. Not so in the case of adoption. But why would any theologian think it politic to suppress such a winsome pastoral doctrine? If the same were true of the doctrines of Hell or predestination, we could perhaps begin to understand, but the doctrine of adoption, surely not? As unlikely as it seems, this appears to have been the case in at least three instances. Of course, eternity will tell the precise motives involved, although it is difficult not to draw certain conclusions from looks to varying degrees very much like the repression of adoption.

The first example suggests that adoption was found to be inconvenient due to its close connection to predestination. Nowhere is this nexus more obvious in Scripture than in Ephesians 1:4-5, which text was – for Calvin at least – the *locus classicus* of the doctrine of predestination: 'In love the Father predestined [or pre-horizoned (*proorisas*)] us for adoption [*huiothesian*] through Jesus Christ.' By giving priority to this text over, say, the teaching of Romans 9 Calvin signified his concern that

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[33] *Discussions of Theological Questions* (Harrisonburg, VA, 1986), pp. 428-9. The fact that Girardeau wrote these words subsequent to the Candlish/Crawford debate and probably without knowledge of the Scheeben/Granderath contention testifies to the comparative insignificance of these localised encounters *vis à vis* the importance of the great trinitarian, christological and soteriological upheavals of church history (*ibid.*).

[34] H. Martin, *Christ's Presence in the Gospel History*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 1865), p. 80fn.

predestination be utilised for pastoral purposes; for he understood that in Ephesians 1 predestination highlights the fact that the gospel begins with grace, involves adoption, and leads to glory.

By contrast, John Wesley appears to have repressed adoption (although strangely not in his piety) seemingly because of its connection to predestination. Although Wesleyan Methodists (and Calvinistic ones for that matter)[35] happily emphasised in their devotional lives the Fatherhood of God and knew, apparently, an abundant measure of the Spirit of adoption,[36] for whatever reason Wesley excised every reference to adoption from his revision of the Shorter Catechism.[37] This astonishing move is difficult to account for, especially when we remember that the neighbouring doctrine of assurance was a distinctive feature of Wesley's teaching and contributed in no small part to the Methodist emphasis on the Spirit of adoption.

In attempting to explain Wesley's thinking we can but offer conjecture. He may have felt, for instance, that there were no words in human language that could adequately express what the Holy Spirit works in the children of God. Yet this would not explain why he banished from his revised catechism one of the few biblical models given us for this very purpose. After all, adoption is an essential cause of the believer's confidence before God.[38] Alternatively, Wesley may have been attempting to cast justification and sanctification into bolder relief. Most probable, however, is the suggestion that he was seeking to side-step the close connection between adoption and the decree.[39]

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[35] See 'The Theological History of Adoption, I: An Account', *op. cit.*, pp. 24-5.

[36] J. Scott Lidgett, *The Victorian Transformation of Theology*. The second series of Maurice Lectures delivered at King's College, London, Lent term, 1934 (London, 1934), pp. 52-3.

[37] See John Wesley's 'Revision of the Shorter Catechism', *The Banner of Truth Magazine* 47 (March-April 1967), p. 24. This is reprinted from Wesley's *Revision of the Shorter Catechism* (Edinburgh, 1906). Questions and answers to numbers 7, 8, 20, 31, 34 are eradicated. Numbers 14, 21, 30, 32, 35, 36, and 37 are altered.

[38] John Stoughton, *History of Religion in England, from the Opening of the Long Parliament to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 6, *The Church in the Georgian Era*, new and revised ed. (London, 1881), p. 119.

[39] Robert C. Monk, *John Wesley – His Puritan Heritage: A Study of the Christian Life* (London, 1966), pp. 57-8. For more on adoption see also p. 86 and the appropriate references in Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (London, 1960).

Whatever the truth of the matter, Wesley's action, which signalled a dichotomy between his theology and his piety, must have contributed at some level to the apparent Methodist indifference to the theology of adoption. Intriguing it is that the same Wesley who excised adoption from his revision of the Shorter Catechism could nevertheless speak eloquently of the Spirit of adoption: 'By the testimony of the Spirit I mean, an inward impression of the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God, that Jesus Christ has loved me and given Himself for me; and that my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God.'[40]

Wesley's approach contrasts sharply with that of his contemporary and critic, the Baptist (some say hyper-Calvinistic Baptist), John Gill (1697-1771).[41] Gill, who, we noted in the first article, allotted a separate section on adoption in Book Six of his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, understood adoption to be rooted in what he called an internal act of God. As opposed to God's external acts, the internal acts are those done in eternity past and include the union of the elect with God, their justification and adoption.[42] In thinking aloud of these acts, Gill reasoned:

> I know not where better to place them, and take them into consideration, than next to the decree of God, and particularly the decree of election: since as that flows from the love of God, and is in Christ from everlasting, there must of course be an union to him so early: and since predestination to the adoption of children, and acceptance in the beloved are parts and branches of it, Eph. I. 4, 5, 6, they must be of the same date.[43]

Thus, at conversion, the elect merely realise that their adoption into the family of God occurred in eternity past.[44]

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[40] Stoughton, *History of Religion in England, op. cit.*, p. 119.

[41] P. Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity 1689-1765* (London, 1967), p. 98.

[42] See also Book Two (Gill's *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* in his *Body of Divinity*, reprinted from the London ed., 1839 (Atlanta, GA, 1950), p. 172, pp. 201ff.). Assuming Toon is correct, the distinction between the internal and external acts of God was common to hyper-Calvinists of the first half of the eighteenth century; the former including predestination, eternal union, eternal adoption and eternal justification (*The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism*, pp. 108-11). In connection with adoption, however, Toon only makes reference to Gill's *Body of Divinity* and John Brine's *Motives to Love and Unity*.

[43] Gill, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

[44] Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism*, p. 124.

Whatever the rights or wrongs of Gill's conclusion (the matter does not concern us here), the contrast between Wesley's ambivalence about the theology of adoption and Gill's desire to emphasise the divine sovereignty in salvation is clear. Sadly, Calvinistic Methodists do not appear to have compensated for Wesley's approach. To have done so would not have necessitated a locating of adoption in eternity past, anymore, for instance, than it did for Calvin.[45] Instead, Calvinistic Methodists were, like their Wesleyan counterparts, limited in their interest in the theology of adoption. Accordingly their passivity in this regard helped contribute to the shaping of the lopsided soteriology that increasingly characterised the theology of the later Calvinistic tradition.

The second example we have in mind takes us from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century and from England to Scotland. By the early decades of the nineteenth century the time was ripe for a backlash against the predominant legal understanding of the gospel espoused by Westminster Calvinists. Among those influential in yearning and pushing for a paradigmatic shift towards a more familial understanding of the gospel was Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788-1870). His appeal, being part of a personal megashift from an early Calvinism to a final Universalism, involved ironically the abandonment of his early (and somewhat unusual) emphasis on adoption.[46]

The earliest Erskine mentions adoption is in his introductory essay to Richard Baxter's *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1824).[47] The following year he wrote an introductory essay for the Collins edition of the *Letters of*

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[45] See 'An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition', *op. cit.*, ch. 2.1.

[46] All this is documented in Part Two of 'An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition', *op. cit.*

[47] Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, with an introductory essay by Thomas Erskine *Esq.*, 1824, pp. xxxii-iii (no other details are given). In this essay Erskine regards God's family as consisting of those adopted in Christ. The adopted possess an assurance that in suffering with Christ they shall also be glorified together with him. This glorification is earnestly anticipated for it dawns with the full manifestation of the privileges of the sons of God. Erskine recognises, then, the eschatological tension of Paul's theology. Although family members have already received the charter of adoption, which authorises them to speak to their heavenly Father, they nevertheless wait for the adoption, the redemption of their bodies. 'There is,' he says, 'but one joy and one adoption; but they contain the principle of infinite expansion and enlargement.'

Samuel Rutherford.[48] Again, he expresses a familial understanding of the gospel but within the full range of its juridical elements.[49] This time, however, he mentions adoption but the once:

> A restoration to spiritual health is the *ultimate object* of God in His dealings with the children of men. Whatever else God hath done with regard to men, has been subsidiary, and with a view to this; even the unspeakable work of Christ, and pardon freely offered through His cross, have been but means to a further end; and that end is, that the adopted children of the family of God might be conformed to the likeness of their elder brother, – that they might resemble Him in character, and thus enter into His joy.[50]

Later, in a letter dated 11 November 1832, Erskine mentions but in passing the Spirit of adoption.[51] Later still he writes: 'I may observe here, that it was not merely to prove his love, and his readiness to make a sacrifice, that God gave his Son to the world; but because he desired to make the world *sons of God.* The gift of the Son was the gift of *sonship*; the only-begotten Son is the Fountain of adoption.'[52]

From this reconstruction it becomes increasingly apparent that with the passing of the years Erskine's use of the adoption motif became evermore infrequent the closer he drew to Universalism. This is ironic, for the reverse would have been assumed. Not so, however. Once Erskine's final

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[48] *Letters of the Rev. Samuel Rutherford*, with an introductory essay by Thomas Erskine, *Esq.* 3rd ed. (Glasgow, 1830), pp. v-xxvi.

[49] *Ibid.*, pp. x-xi.

[50] *Ibid.*, pp. xii-xiii; *cf.* John B. Logan, 'Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: Lay Theologian of the "Inner Light"', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37 (1984), p. 24. He also speaks in brief of some of the implications of adoption. He writes, for instance, of 'the rights and immunities of God's family [which] consist in possessing the favour of God, in approaching to him at all times as our Father, in enjoying what he enjoys, in rejoicing to see his will accomplished through the wide range of his dominions, and in being ourselves made instruments in accomplishing it' (Introductory essay to *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, p. xv; *cf.* p. xvi).

[51] *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, vol. 1 (1800-1840), edited by William Hanna (Edinburgh, 1877), p. 276.

[52] *The Doctrine of Election and its Connection with the General Tenor of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 1878), p. 232. See also his comments on Rom. 8:12-25 (*ibid.*, pp. 238-42). It is interesting here in that while he gives the AV translation of verse 15 which uses the term 'adoption', his own scant comments are coined in terms of sonship.

work *The Spiritual Order* (hereafter *SO*)[53] was published all mention of adoption is gone. It is not difficult to see why. If all humanity have continued to be filially related to God even subsequent to the fall, wherein lies the need to be adopted? There is none! In Universalism adoption becomes superfluous. Reflecting on the tensions of the nineteenth century, James Matthew noted that:

> If all men are already, as men, God's children, and have always been so, it needs no adoption to make them so; if universal Fatherhood is a fact, and not a fiction, and by consequence if there be universal Sonship naturally belonging to all men, there is and there can be, so far as we can understand it, no such thing as Adoption. Adoption is, *per se*, a denial of such universality....[54]

Erskine gradually excised adoption from his theology by substituting the motif for a more general concept of sonship that did not have to imply the idea of entrance into the state, let alone a forensic understanding of the process. That is, by referring to sonship he could espouse an exclusively familial Universalism without the forensic overtones of the adoptive act.

Erskine's treatment of Romans 1-9 in *SO* gives some clues as to how he managed to change his theology.[55] By foregoing close exegetical scrutiny of the biblical text, he was able to make assertions about it without actually quoting it on more than a few occasions. Even when drawing on a passage that mentions adoption (such as Rom. 8:14-15) he succeeded in avoiding its implications of redemptive sonship. This he achieved, first by translating *huiothesia* more generally as 'sonship',[56] and then by omitting any reference to Paul's use of *huiothesia* in Romans 8:23 or 9:4.

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[53] *The Spiritual Order and other Papers Selected from the Manuscripts of the late Thomas Erskine* (Edinburgh, 1871).

[54] James Matthew, 'The Doctrine of Sonship and the Sonship of Believers', *The Theological Review and Free Church College Quarterly* 2 (1886), p. 25.

[55] *SO*, pp. 100-230.

[56] What is especially interesting about this is that earlier in *The Doctrine of Election* Erskine had quoted Romans 8:15 straight from the Authorized Version where *huiothesia* is rendered 'adoption' rather than 'sonship'. However, even then his flight to Universalism was all but complete, which explains the fact that his scant comments are coined in terms of sonship and not adoption. Furthermore, whereas in *The Doctrine of Election* Erskine had referred to Christ as the 'Fountain of adoption', in *The Spiritual Order* the epithet is exchanged for the more general phrase the 'Fountain of sonship' (*cf. The Doctrine of Election*, p. 232 and *SO*, p. 232).

As subtle as these changes are they were set against the backdrop of Erskine's *a priori* abandonment of sound hermeneutical and exegetical principles. Instead of the hard graft of Spirit-led exegesis he favoured a semi-pelagian confidence in humanity's 'inner light' as capable of witnessing to the objective authority of Scripture. Looked at closely, this involved his wresting of the authority of truth from the Holy Scriptures, placing it alternatively in the personal assurance of its discernment; namely, the inward facts of spiritual consciousness and the outward facts of life. Thus, reliant on experience (without – it may be noted – any mention of the aid of the Holy Spirit),[57] Erskine saw no reason to prove his universalistic assumptions from Scripture. Rather Scripture merely confirms what humanity already recognises, namely, that God is our Father. This position, however, is self-defeating. While humanity retains the knowledge of God (Rom. 1:21), our natural estrangement from our Creator means that we do not retain the knowledge of God as Father. In any case, there are many whose 'inner light' cannot help but regard Erskine's final Universalism as both a clear distortion of Scripture – symptomatic of which is his suppression of the very doctrine that continues to make Universalism biblically and theologically untenable – and a denial of experience.

Thirdly, and perhaps most curiously, we come to our own day and the so-called 'new perspective on Paul'.[58] Although seminally influenced in its present form by Krister Stendahl, E. P. Sanders and James Dunn, for many the new perspective has become inextricably linked with the more popular influence of N. T. ('Tom') Wright.[59] Without wishing to be unfair to him, it is in his writings that we find what looks like either one of the more incredible examples of the oversight of adoption or one of the more wilful

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[57] *SO*, p. 84.

[58] For brief but helpful introductions to the present debate see Colin G. Kruse, *Paul, the Law and Justification* (Leicester, England, 1996), pp. 35-53. Also accessible are John R. W. Stott's prefatory comments in his commentary on Romans (*The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today Series, first published 1994 and reprinted (Leicester, 1996), pp. 24-31).

[59] As is increasingly recognised, talk of what James Dunn labelled a new perspective on Paul warrants a twofold qualification. First, the new perspective is not really about Paul. It is about first century Judaism. Secondly, the perspective is not really new. See Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective*. With an essay by Donald A. Hagner (Downers Grove, IL, 2001), pp. 33ff.

instances of its suppression. Certainly, by drawing attention to this issue it may be possible to introduce to the current debate a fresh perspective that has the advantage of not only addressing constructively one of the major concerns of the new perspective from a standpoint of classical Protestant orthodoxy, but also of highlighting the strategic doctrinal and apologetic role that adoption can play in biblical and historico-theological discussions.

Wright's understanding of Justification is laid out succinctly in his chapter, 'Justification: The Biblical Basis and its Relevance for Contemporary Evangelicalism'.[60] There he expounds the doctrine first from the Old Testament and then from the various perspectives of the New Testament – the Gospels and Acts, Paul (Gal., Phil., Rom.) and other authors. Two features stand out: his communal or familial definition of justification and his silence about adoption, which, taken together, give the appearance that he has completely sunk adoption into justification, yet without any notification that that is in fact what he has done.

'Justification', says Wright, 'is God's declaration that certain people are within the covenant', meaning that, 'those who believe the Gospel are in the right, are members of the covenant family'.[61] Driving this communal understanding of justification is a rejection of the individualistic definition ('How can a man be right with God?') that generally characterised the reformers' understanding. The basis of this alternative definition is rooted in the view that justification is not a subject in its own right, but part of the larger picture of God's covenantal purposes for his people. This Wright traces back not only to the Old Testament but to Jesus and to Paul: 'For Paul, as for Jesus, the salvation of the individual is set in the context of God's redefinition of Israel, his call of a worldwide family whose sins are forgiven in the blood of the new covenant.'[62]

With profuse mention of the covenant family it is a mystery that Wright defines entrance into it exclusively in terms of justification. One would have expected the clear Pauline teaching on adoption to be essential to his understanding of the covenant family. After all, adoption has its own

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[60] See Tony Baker, George Carey, John Tiller, Tom Wright, *The Great Acquittal: Justification by Faith and Current Christian Thought* (London, 1980), pp. 13-37.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 15. This definition has remained unchanged with the passing of the years: '"Justification" is the doctrine which insists that all those who have this faith belong as full members of this family on this basis and no other' (*What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?*, Grand Rapids, MI and Cincinnati, OH, 1997, p. 133).

[62] 'Justification', p. 21.

distinct term (*huiothesia*), context, and climactic use in three of Paul's major epistles (Eph. 1:4-5; Gal. 4:4-5 and Rom. 8:22-23). It is bewildering, then, and probably not a little significant to discover that not once does Wright refer to adoption, not even in his expositions of Galatians and Romans. In a manner reminiscent of Erskine's treatment of Romans 8, Wright mentions sonship, citing Romans 8:14-17 as well as Galatians 4:1-7 in the footnotes,[63] but does no justice to adoption itself.[64]

Nowhere does Wright's silence on adoption become more deafening than when he states that, 'Romans 8 points to the crowning glory of Paul's doctrine of justification'.[65] That it may do, but it is as feasible to argue that the crowning glory to which Romans 8 points is the adoption for which the whole created order groans (8:17-23). Thus it may be valid to argue that in the context of Paul's thought it is not justification that declares that the believer is within the covenant family, it is ultimately adoption!

This unique response to the new perspective is not without its implications. First, it demonstrates how strategically important a grasp of the history and theology of adoption can be. In this instance, a modest knowledge of the glaring contradiction between the place of adoption in biblical soteriology and its profile in historical theology goes a long way to exposing the inadequacies of the present debate. The fact that Wright can redefine justification so that it covers the terrain occupied in the best Protestant formulations by both justification and adoption, yet without the faintest mention of adoption, is as great a cause of bewilderment as those responses to Wright that harp on about the classical Reformation understanding of justification without the slightest acknowledgement of the validity of Wright's point; namely that the Protestant statements on justification were in fact too often exclusively individualistic and lacking the communal implications implied in the Scriptures by Paul's doctrine of adoption.

What proponents from both sides of the debate need to be aware of, therefore, is how their respective positions have been distorted by their lack of attention to adoption. On the one hand, Wright's definition of justification does no justice to the apex of Paul's soteriology. On the other hand, the forgetting of the importance of adoption has rendered orthodox Protestants ill equipped to counter effectively Wright's redefining of

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[63] *Ibid.*, pp. 26 and 116.
[64] The same complaint can be made of *What Saint Paul Really Said*, pp. 95-133.
[65] 'Justification', p. 27.

justification. Only once both sides have done justice to the Pauline teaching on adoptive sonship in Romans 8, Galatians 3-4 and Ephesians 1 may we see, in this respect at least, a coming together of the two sides of the debate.

Secondly, and in a similar vein, as valid as Wright's protest against an overly-individualised gospel may be, we discern in the new perspective the oft-repeated but infrequently recognised pattern that characterises the cut and thrust of theological debate; namely, that a protest may be valid even when its solution is invalid. This, we have argued, is the case with Wright's definition of justification. For all the warrant of those traditional (and critical) responses to the new perspective, there has been to date a failure to recognise the kernel of truth in the protest; which is that the gospel terminates (in an immediate sense) not on the forgiveness of a sinner's transgressions but on his or her entrance into the family of God. To agree that Wright has a valid point here is a far cry, however, from conceding all to the advocates of the new perspective. A more constructive approach to the challenge of the new perspective would involve recognising up front what little justice Protestant orthodoxy has done to this biblical truth. This would not only entail a greater awareness of the importance of adoption in the *corpus Paulinum* but also the utilisation of the apostle's doctrine so as to remedy Wright's ill-defined understanding of justification.

Thirdly, in formulating a more constructive response to the new perspective much help may be gained from none other than John Calvin. Thus, while we heed Wright's advice to return to the New Testament,[66] we cannot jettison the opinions of Calvin, the theologian of adoption *par excellence* and one of the best exegetes of the past. To do so would be to move towards the very historico-theological detachment that has led proponents of the new perspective to the ellipsis of adoption and the overly hasty and sweeping application of their controversial findings to the Reformation debates.

Wright need not be overly concerned with our appreciation of Calvin's exegesis of the New Testament. After all Calvin's rich understanding of soteriology teaches us that in principle, even if not in the details, Wright's emphasis on the covenant family is a healthy corrective to the typical classical treatments of justification which have consistently isolated the doctrine from the communal orientation of adoption. Nevertheless, Calvin's understanding of the biblical relationship between justification and adoption is much to be preferred to Wright's redefining of

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[66] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

justification.[67] This is, first of all, precisely because the reformer does justice to adoption whereas Wright does not.[68] Calvin's understanding that justification is the 'main hinge on which religion turns'[69] presents no difficulty to his understanding that the 'grace of adoption... bestows salvation entire'.[70] By contrast we cannot help but notice Wright's ellipsis of adoption in his discussion of justification:

> The people of God are an historical and visible family, demonstrating their historical nature in the sacraments and in that continuity of ministry, in the context of life under the Word of God, for which the later writings of the New Testament show so much concern. Justification is not an individual's charter, but God's declaration that we belong to the covenant community. If we are not taking that community seriously, we have not understood justification.
> ... [I]f justification declares that the believer is a member of the covenant community, that community itself is called to live as the family who accept one another in love.[71]

And more so:

> If justification is God's assurance that those who belong to the Messiah are indeed members of his covenant family, then the whole of the New Testament is all about justification – which is, after all, what we should

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[67] When Wright says 'I have no desire, as some appear to have, to play down the value of our Reformation heritage: but I believe we are most faithful to the Reformers when we go back to the New Testament and see whether we can understand it even better than they did', I am gladdened, but simply disagree that, on the issue of the relationship between justification and adoption at least, he has understood the New Testament better than Calvin (*ibid.*).

[68] See once again 'An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition', *op. cit.*, chs 1-4.

[69] 'Ut meminerimus praecipuum esse sustinendae religionis cardinem' (*Inst.* III.xi.1 [*CO* 2 (30): 533]). In his sermon on Luke 1:5-10, Calvin says of justification that it is 'the principle of the whole doctrine of salvation and of the foundation of all religion' (cited François Wendel, *Calvin*, London, 1963, p. 256).

[70] *Calvin's Tracts and Treatises*, vol. 3, translated from the original Latin and French by Henry Beveridge, historical notes and introduction to the current edition by T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh, and London, 1958), p. 275 [*CO* 7 (35): 619] as was cited in the previous article p. 19.

[71] 'Justification', p. 36.

expect from a book whose collective title indicates that it is the documentation of the new covenant.[72]

Secondly, we note in passing that Calvin's more biblical approach suggests *contra* the hasty and therefore somewhat naïve advice of the proponents of the new perspective that the benefits of the Reformation are best left intact.[73]

Bearing these two factors in mind, it is by no means clear to this author at least that the new perspective contains any benefits for those adhering to a fully Calvinian understanding of soteriology (that is, adoption included), even if its protest carries a timely message to Protestants in general. The questions of first-century Judaism apart, had advocates of the new perspective a better knowledge of Calvin, they may have found much of their protest answered from Geneva. In Calvin we find due emphasis on the covenantal setting of the gospel, the fundamental importance of union with Christ (so countering the accusation that the imputation of Christ's righteousness is a legal fiction), and the fully worked out corporate or communal application of the gospel. Accordingly, there is a strong case for arguing that Wright's protest is resolvable within the traditional categories of soteriology – justification, adoption, sanctification – so long as full justice is done to the believer's membership of the household of God. Arguments may persist about vital details such as imputation,[74] but Calvin's doctrine is so hedged around from accusations

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[72] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[73] While affirming with Wright the sadness of the frequent petty-mindedness of the divisions of the visible church, one wonders from more recent comments of his whether he is now as adamant about the value of our Reformation heritage: 'Paul's doctrine of justification impels the churches, in their current fragmented state, into the ecumenical task. It cannot be right that the very doctrine which declares that all who believe in Jesus belong at the same table (Galatians 2) should be used as a way of saying that some, who define the doctrine of justification differently, belong to a different table. The doctrine of justification, in other words, is not merely a doctrine which Catholic and Protestant might just be able to agree on, as a result of hard ecumenical endeavour. It is itself the ecumenical doctrine, the doctrine that rebukes all our petty and often culture-bound church groupings, and which declares that all who believe in Jesus belong together in one family.... The doctrine of justification is in fact the great *ecumenical* doctrine' (*What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 158).

[74] Writing of 1 Cor. 1:30, Wright states: 'It is the only passage I know where something called 'the imputed righteousness of Christ,' a phrase more often found in post-Reformation theology and piety than in the New

of a legal fiction that at face value there is merit to the conclusion that the so-called new perspective is, by comparison with Calvin's soteriology, another valid but seemingly aberrant protest against the loss of a familial understanding of covenant (and adoption, we may add) in classic Protestant theology.

CONCLUSION

Further research may yet reveal other examples of how adoption has proven theologically inconvenient. It is not difficult to see, for instance, how the doctrine could impinge on the feminist agenda. After all, it is certain that an appeal for a greater emphasis on the Fatherhood of God (particularly with its appropriation of the language of '*Abba*') and the adoption of sons (with Paul's play on the union of the Son (*huios*) and the sons (*huioi*)) is contrary to the feminist clamour for maternal references to God and gender-neutral language for the believer's status in the divine-human relationship.

Although an investigation of the impact of the feminist agenda on the discussion of adoption lies beyond the scope of this essay, and not wanting to end on a polemical note, it is nevertheless apparent that the feminine metaphors used in Scripture for God as well as some of the female orientated denotations of filial status (notably Paul's use of *thugateras* in 2 Cor. 6:18) have proved insufficient to satisfy feminist demands. Where Scripture continues to serve as the dictum for theology, however, these expectations will inevitably remain unmet.

In the meantime we conclude this two-part study with the hope that enough has been accomplished to stimulate the sort of serious discussion beneficial to the recovery of adoption. If the entire theological history of adoption teaches us nothing else it certainly warns us that success cannot be guaranteed. Ironically history is demonstrating that the ongoing transition towards a more familial understanding of the gospel has itself become a significant factor in the thwarting of the recovery of adoption. As our study has shown, those favouring the substitution of the traditional legal model for a more contemporary familial model too consistently show scant regard for the biblical and theological categories available.

Testament, finds any basis in the text. But if we are to claim it as such, we must also be prepared to talk of the imputed wisdom of Christ; the imputed sanctification of Christ; and the imputed redemption of Christ; and that, though no doubt they are all true in some general sense, will certainly make nonsense of the very specialized and technical senses so frequently given to the phrase "the righteousness of Christ" in the history of theology' (*ibid.*, p. 123).

Accordingly, the appropriate desire to give adequate expression to the familial aspect of the gospel becomes a rather political attempt to underplay its forensic core. In response, conservatives, sensing that the emphasising of the familial is but a throwback to Victorian liberalism, only exacerbate their frequent failure to reflect the New Testament's balancing of the juridical and familial by failing to draw upon the familial categories available in Scripture.

Thus, our study of adoption's history raises serious methodological, hermeneutical and exegetical questions for both conservatives and liberals alike. More open-minded liberals would do well to consider how it has been possible for the paternity of God to prevail over his justice without the commensurate development of adoption – the very means in Paul's understanding by which those once enslaved can enter upon a filial relationship to God their Father. The more conservative would do well to ask themselves what they hope to gain in the defence of orthodoxy by merely banging the forensic drum if all their efforts pay but lip-service to the New Testament emphasis on the Fatherhood of God and the sonship/childhood of his people.

Presently there are some hopeful signs for the recovery of adoption. Certainly the theological history of the doctrine contrasts markedly with the more recent growth of interest in the theme of sonship in biblical studies.[75] If things are to improve, however, the historical and systematic theologians (whether conservative, liberal or neo-conservative/neo-liberal) must take the present opportunity to play their part. There is a decreasing excuse for not doing so. Knowledge of some of the more crucial resources in the annals of historical theology is now available. These need to be utilised if the doctrine is to be integrated into the everyday theology of the church. What benefits could await the neglected study of soteriology and the Spirit-given understanding of the Christian self in relation to Father-God were adoption to be at last recovered by the church. We dare not hold our breath, but then we dare not give up hope either.

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[75] See 'The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation, I: The Adoption Metaphor in Biblical Usage', *op. cit.*, p. 131 fn. 10.