

The Pauline Doctrine of Adoption: Implications of the Trinitarian Accomplishment of Adoption for Christian Spiritual Formation

By

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the entirety of the work contained herein is my own original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that I have properly acknowledged and referenced my use of other sources, that reproduction and publication thereof by the South African Theological Seminary (SATS) will not infringe any third party rights, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MAU', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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Kenilworth, England

4 May 2023

Dedication

I dedicate this study to my father, Professor Enrico Uliana, whom I miss.

Acknowledgements

The writing of this thesis has coincided with a difficult period for my family. Beatings and shipwrecks we have been spared (2 Cor 11:23–28), but other difficulties have been such that our own meagre strength and endurance have been so depleted that we, like the faithful Apostle whose thoughts I have tried to think after him in this study, have at times despaired (2 Cor 1:8). I, and we, give thanks to those who have been ministers of the Father's great and many mercies to us through this time.

Thanks are due first to my two supervisors: Dr Tim Churchill and Dr George Coon. They have encouraged me to study the words and arguments of Scripture more carefully than I previously knew how, to hunt for the (sometimes overlooked) treasures of historical theology, to formulate my own theological presentation with care and with confidence, and to explore with joy the transforming entailments of our beautiful salvation—adoption as sons of the Living God! Moreover, they have shown patience with me as I've needed to pause for significant periods when circumstances were overwhelming; they have prayed for my family and me, counselled me, shared some of their own journeys with me, and fanned a flame for service in my heart (2 Tim 1:6). If their example is typical of research supervisors, everyone should write a thesis just for the blessing of such wonderful care and encouragement.

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Finally, and most of all, to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who predestined his elect—even me!—to adoption to himself through Jesus Christ: Thank you! What glorious grace!

Abbreviations

ANF *Ante-Nicene Fathers*

ASV American Standard Version, 1995

BDAG Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. Chicago, 2000–2002

CSB Christian Standard Bible, 2020

Darby Darby, J. N. *The Holy Scriptures: A New Translation for the Original Languages*, 1996 (1880)

ESV English Standard Version, 2016

HCSB The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version, 2009

ISV International Standard Version, 2011

KJV The Holy Bible: King James Version (1900 Authorised Version), 2009

L&N *Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., 1996 (Louw and Nida)

LEB *The Lexham English Bible*, 2012

LXX Septuagint with Logos Morphology. Rahlfs Edition, 1979.

NASB New American Standard Bible, 1995

NIDNTTE *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*

NIDOTTE *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*

NIV The New International Version, 2011

NKJV The New King James Version, 1982

NPNF¹ *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of The Christian Church, First Series*

NPNF² *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of The Christian Church, Second Series*

NRSV The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, 1989

RSV The Revised Standard Version, 1971

WCF *Westminster Confession of Faith, 1646.*

YLT Young's Literal Translation, 1997

Abstract

The aim of this research is to explore the ways in which the apostle Paul's soteriological metaphor of adoption bears upon the enterprise of Christian spiritual formation. Western soteriology has long been dominated by an almost exclusively forensic paradigm. This, in turn, has allowed a truncated understanding of Christianity to take hold—one in which personal formation in Christlikeness features too little. By expounding the Pauline metaphor of *υιοθεσία* (adoption) and explicating the entailments of the objective condition of adoptive sonship for the human self, this study demonstrates that Christian salvation is inherently transformative.

The project consists of four steps. In the first, an exegetical study of the metaphor of adoption in the Pauline corpus, five key doctrinal emphases are distilled. In the second, an analysis of the treatment of the doctrine of adoption through the history of the church finds that the best historical treatments of the doctrine preserved those same five emphases, with adoption often serving as a synonym for salvation *in toto*.

Step three formulates a fresh but biblically and historically faithful doctrine of adoption, styled so as to highlight the implications of the soteriological accomplishment of adoption for Christian spiritual formation. Finally, in step four, the entailments of the objective condition of adoptive sonship are mapped onto the six aspects of the human self to show that the accomplishment of adoption bears not only *implications*, but rather inescapable *entailments*, for Christian spiritual formation.

The study concludes that a biblically faithful soteriology is one that embraces more than just justification, and that the Pauline metaphor of adoption presents a soteriology in which formation in Christlikeness is inherent to the very nature of salvation. The implications of such a holistic soteriology are significant not only in the realm of theological scholarship but also for pastoral ministry and ordinary Christian experience.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Thesis title*

The Pauline doctrine of adoption: Implications of the Trinitarian accomplishment of adoption for Christian spiritual formation.

1.2 *Definitions*

In this study, unless otherwise defined in any particular instance:

Adoption refers to the metaphor *υιοθεσία* (adoption), which in the New Testament is used only by the Apostle Paul, and only in Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; and Ephesians 1:5.

Christian spiritual formation is “the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself” (Willard 2002, 22).

1.3 *Review of scholarship*

Willard (2010, 45–60) laments a form of Christianity—one that he believes to be pervasive in Western Christendom—that understands salvation as merely a matter of having one’s sins forgiven and an entry ticket to heaven, and in which transformation

towards Christlikeness does not feature. The root of the problem, he argues, is an inadequate soteriology: specifically, that justification is often presented as the whole story.

As heirs of the Protestant Reformation, it is no surprise that justification has prominence in Western soteriology (cf. Trumper 2002b, 179–183). Nor would any responsible evangelical scholar bemoan its prominence on biblical-theological grounds. Yet, as Beeke (2008, Chapter 4) observes, justification considered in isolation yields no more than “a rather bare, legal concept.” Millar (2021, 9–13) finds the same deficiency, arguing that the modern Reformed movement has over-reacted to the errors of an over-realised eschatology (e.g., in Wesley’s ‘Keswick theology,’ some strands of Pentecostalism, and the so-called ‘prosperity gospel’) with an arid, under-realised eschatology in which justification has become, functionally, the whole story, and insufficient attention is given to personal transformation.¹ Willard, Beeke, and Millar are all, in other words, jealous for a holistic soteriology that understands believers as more than forensically justified moral agents, but also as image-bearers being actually transformed towards Christlikeness.

This emphasis is championed by Willard’s (2002, 22) understanding of Christian spiritual formation, namely that it has to do with “becom[ing] like ... Christ.” Copan (2010) convincingly defends Willard’s proposal, arguing that it accurately represents the apostle Paul’s understanding of the purpose and content of pastoral ministry, which Paul expounds in terms of ‘imitation’ (cf. 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; 1 Thess 1:5–7). Though it is implicit in Willard’s definition, Greenman’s (2010, 24) explicit recognition that Christian spiritual formation takes place “in the community of faith” is helpful. Whatever the nuances of the definition, the substance of the matter has received much attention in recent years.²

Barton et al. (2014) are of one mind in asserting that Christian spiritual formation cannot take place apart from the church. Equally, they share a concern that the church,

1 Millar (2021, 13) observes that, within the evangelical community, the concerns regarding the dangers of an over-realised eschatology are not matched by warnings against the poverty of an under-realised eschatology.

2 Asumang (2012, 173) notes that the attention is not really new, but rather that the history of Christianity has seen alternating emphases—on evangelism during certain periods and on spiritual formation during others.

at least in the Western world, has not fully embraced, or even understood, its mandate in this regard. Several scholars (e.g., Chandler in Barton et al. 2014, 298; Hunt 2009; Johnson 2001, 310; Williams 2006) trace the problem to a foggy sense of Christian identity. But this is to be expected if the substance of our gospel, in practice even if not in theory, is merely that we are justified—that is, if there is nothing inherent within our functional soteriology that bestows identity.

Much current literature on spiritual formation recognises the vital connection between the content of our soteriology and the shape of Christian spiritual formation (e.g., Barton in Barton et al. 2014, 296; Cepero 2006; Kopic 2014; Preston 2010). It is curious, therefore, that the Pauline doctrine of adoption has been so little explored in this context. In Greenman and Kalantzis's (2010) *Life in the Spirit*,³ for example, there is only a single explicit connection between adoption and spiritual formation (cf. Nordling 2010, 211).

Recent scholarship on the doctrine of adoption has tended toward one of three directions: (1) historical theology; (2) analyses of the most likely sociocultural background to the Pauline metaphor of adoption; and (3) biblical-theological and systematic studies. A brief reflection on each of these will help locate the ambition of the present study.

Works of historical theology include Trumper's (2001) and Saito's (2016) doctoral dissertations—both of which note the relative lack of attention the doctrine of adoption has attracted through the history of the church (cf. Trumper 2001, 1–35; Saito 2016, 9–32).⁴ Both recognise Irenaeus as the fountainhead of the doctrine outside of the New Testament canon itself, while noting that his emphasis was not on adoption per se but on the related doctrine of the Fatherhood of God. Writing in response to the Gnosticism of the time, Irenaeus's employment of the metaphor of adoption in *Against Heresies*, for example, *Against Heresies* 3.6.1 (ANF 1:419), 3.16.3 (ANF 1:441); 4.1.1 (ANF 1:463); 5.12.2 (ANF 1:538) is theologically significant but relatively undeveloped—although further references to adoption in *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* do fill out Irenaeus's presentation of adoption in ways that will be significant to this

3 Essays from the 2009 Wheaton Theology Conference devoted to the topic of spiritual formation.

4 At a more popular level the same sentiment has been expressed by J. I. Packer and Sinclair Ferguson (cf. Packer 2004, 258; Ferguson 1989, xi–xiii).

study. For similar reasons, the doctrine of adoption failed to reach full flower in the writings of other church fathers (e.g. Origen, for example, *Against Celsus*, 8.6 (ANF 4:641–642); Athanasius’ *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, Discourse 2, chapter 21, paragraph 59 (NPNF² 4:380–381); Discourse 3, chapter 25, paragraph 19 (NPNF² 4:404–405); or Augustine’s *Tractates on St. John’s Gospel* 1.4 (NPNF¹ 7:8); 2.13 (NPNF¹ 7:17))⁵—to the extent that they took up either the sonship of the believer or the Fatherhood of God in their writings.

Lidgett (1902, 200) holds that, post-Augustine, conception of the Fatherhood of God “passed entirely out of sight ... [and was] ... replaced by the conception of his sovereignty [which] ruled the theology of the Middle Ages.” Thus, more than a millennium passed before the familial face of the gospel reappeared in a significant way in the theology of Calvin. While none could rightly accuse Calvin of underplaying the sovereignty of God, he nevertheless recovers God’s Fatherhood and, with it, the doctrine of adoption. Even so, and paradoxically because of its importance in Calvin’s theology, the doctrine of adoption received little explicit development in his *Institutes of Christian Religion* (1960). Many have noted the ubiquity of adoption in his theology (Gerrish 1993; Griffith 2001; Trumper 2001; Garner 2016) and posited that the absence of a dedicated chapter in his *Institutes* is explained by the fact that the doctrine pervades and informs the whole to the extent that “the adoption of believers is at the heart of John Calvin’s understanding of salvation” (Griffith 2001, 135). That may be so, but the result was nevertheless that the biblical-theological and systematic structures of the doctrine itself remained underdeveloped.

As to sociocultural background, and with the potential sources being Jewish Old Testament, Greek, or Roman, Burke (2006, 46–71) finds Roman sociolegal practice most likely. Earlier research (e.g., Byrne 1979; Scott 1992) had favoured a Jewish Old Testament background, but Burke finds this improbable for three reasons. First, there is no linguistic evidence for adoption in the Old Testament; second, no evidence for the practice of adoption exists in Jewish law;⁶ and third, where the Old Testament does

5 Though Augustine does not always explicitly use the language of adoption, it is nevertheless inherent within his doctrine of the deification of man (cf. Bonner 1986).

6 Note that this is not the same as saying that the *practice* of adoption was unknown to Old Testament Israel, but specifically that it did not exist in Old Testament Jewish *law*. For this reason, Garner (2016, 42) is reluctant to exclude the possibility that the practice of adoption in Israelite tradition could have influenced Paul’s use of the metaphor.

speak of Israel's sonship, it does so in the language of redemption (e.g., Isa 63:16) and election (Deut 7:7), not adoption. On the other hand, specific provisions of the Roman legal procedure of adoption align neatly with Pauline usage of the metaphor. Furthermore, Paul employs the metaphor only in letters to churches under direct Roman rule.

Heim made an important contribution to the field with her (2014) dissertation. Drawing on contemporary theories of metaphor from fields including the philosophy of language, cognitive and sociolinguistics, and communication and rhetoric theory to investigate Paul's use of adoption metaphors in Romans and Galatians, Heim argued that, whereas previous research emphasised the sociocultural source of the metaphor (whether that be Jewish, Greek, or Roman—or some combination thereof) as determinative of its meaning, in fact metaphors possess “a nuanced implicative complex, which makes it much more appropriate to speak of a spectrum of meaning ... rather than a univocal [one]” (2014, v).

As to biblical-theological and systematic studies, Burke (2006) and Garner (2016) are the two most important recent expounders of the doctrine. Both outline a biblical theology of adoption through the five Pauline passages (i.e., Rom 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5), and Garner goes further to develop the systematic structures of the doctrine. A point of difference between the two is that Garner holds that Jesus was adopted at his resurrection (Rom 1:4) and that his adoption was necessary to the subsequent adoption of believers,⁷ whereas Burke rejects this view.

Excellent though both Burke and Garner are, they stop short of developing the implications of adoption for spiritual formation. Burke does touch upon it—but only just so—in two paragraphs at the end of his final chapter (2006, 196–197). Though it is no criticism of these two scholars, for that was not the end at which their works aimed, it is unfitting that such implications remain undeveloped for what Packer called “*the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification*” (2004, 232, emphasis original).

⁷ This is not to be confused with the adoptionist Christological heresies of the early centuries AD—a distinction Garner is careful to emphasise.

The two works that I am aware of that come closest to the nexus of adoption and Christian spiritual formation are Beeke's (2008) study of adoption in the Puritan tradition and Lin's (2017) doctoral dissertation.

Beeke (2008) presents neither a biblical-theological nor a systematic treatment, but rather the Puritan understanding of adoption under a number of topical headings, such as "The transforming power of adoption" (Ch. 6), "Pastoral advice in promoting adoption" (Ch. 7), "Transformed relationships in adoption" (Ch. 9), and so forth. However, while Beeke and others (e.g. DeWalt 2015) do demonstrate that adoption was an important element of Puritan soteriology and that the Puritans were concerned to develop its experiential and pastoral implications, it must be noted that their theological and biblical treatments of the doctrine per se left something to be desired. Theologically, apart from in the confessional standards⁸ themselves, the Puritans tended to muddle the place of adoption in the *ordo salutis*, sometimes subsuming adoption within, or treating it as the familial face of, justification, and sometimes treating it as a synonym for regeneration. Biblically, they tended to read the apostles Paul and John into one another. For example, Perkins, in *Golden Chain* (Ch. 15, in *Perkins' Works*, vol. 1) expounds John 1:12 in terms of adoption, thereby blurring the distinction between adoption (an exclusively Pauline metaphor) and new birth, a Johannine metaphor—although not exclusive to John's corpus.⁹

Lin's (2017) doctoral dissertation explored the meaning of the phrase "the Spirit of adoption" (Rom 8:15)¹⁰ and its implications for Christian living. Lin does not deny a Roman sociolegal background but argues that Paul's own Damascus road encounter with the resurrected Christ was the primary source of his adoption metaphor. Combining this background with close attention to the pneumatology of Romans and the rhetorical structure of Romans 8:12–30, Lin concludes that the work of the Holy Spirit in bearing internal witness to Christian identity as sons of God is the central point of Romans 8. From this internally realised identity, then, follows correct behaviour. Lin's work will be especially helpful in understanding the ministry of the Holy Spirit in

8 *Viz.* The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), the Savoy Declaration (1658), and the Baptist Confession of Faith (1689).

9 A tendency Beeke (2011), in his own exposition of the implications of the doctrine of adoption, has perpetuated.

10 Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (2011), Crossway Bibles.

the adoption of believers in Romans 8. The present project, however, aims to expound adoption as a Trinitarian accomplishment and so will seek comparable understanding of the roles of the Father and of the Son that, though implicit in Lin's work, are peripheral to his objectives. Furthermore, this project will develop the implications for Christian spiritual formation more extensively than does Lin's dissertation.¹¹

Against this backdrop the present study aims to formulate the doctrine of adoption in such a way as to highlight its implications for Christian spiritual formation.

1.4 Main and subsidiary research questions

The main research question for this study is: In what ways might a theological formulation of the Trinitarian accomplishment of adoption, in its Pauline expression, inform an understanding of Christian spiritual formation? The main research question will be pursued via four subsidiary questions, as follows:

First, what does the Pauline corpus teach about the soteriological accomplishment of adoption, and about the purposes and actions of each of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in relation thereto?

Second, what have theologians historically taught about the doctrine of adoption?

Third, how might we formulate a theology of adoption in such a way as to highlight both its Trinitarian nature and its entailments for Christian spiritual formation?

Fourth, in what ways might current thought relating to Christian spiritual formation benefit from a deeper appreciation of the Trinitarian accomplishment of adoption?

1.5 Delimitations

No research project can responsibly pursue every aspect of a given topic. The related questions are too many. With that in mind, delimitations must be made at the outset (Smith 2008, 141). This project is delimited in the following ways.

¹¹ Though the implications for (per his terminology) "Christian life" throughout his thesis are many, Lin only explicitly develops these over 3 of 378 pages.

1.5.1 Pauline boundaries

This research will stay within the boundaries of the Pauline doctrine of adoption and will not venture into the related Johannine doctrine of new birth. Though both express soteriological realities in familial language, this project is concerned only with adoption as propounded by Paul in Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; and Ephesians 1:5. Equally, the entailments for Christian spiritual formation that this project will seek to draw attention to will be limited to those that may be discerned in the immediate contexts of the aforementioned verses.

1.5.2 Historical boundaries

This project will engage with historical and contemporary works on the doctrine of adoption as detailed in Step 2 of section 1.9 below.

1.5.3 Willardian focus

In exploring the implications of the doctrine of adoption for Christian spiritual formation, this project will rely upon Dallas Willard's model of the human self, as proposed in his *Renovation of the Heart* (2002). Such a focus on Willard is justified, as (1) a model of the self and the interrelationships of its parts is needed to avoid untethered speculation and give focus to our application of adoption; and (2) Willard is a recognised thought-leader as regards theologically informed anthropology and the implications thereof for spiritual formation (as attested by Porter, Moon, and Moreland 2018 being dedicated to Willard and his work in this field).

1.6 *Presuppositions*

I hold that Scripture is inspired, inerrant, infallible, necessary, and authoritative. Furthermore, I hold to the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture: that is, that God superintended the writing of Scripture down to the very choice of words. Thus, God intends the metaphor of adoption to communicate to us something true, specific, and necessary to a fuller appreciation and present realisation of our salvation than we would have if he had not inspired the use of that particular word.

I hold to the perspicuity of the Bible insofar as all that which is necessary to know and believe unto salvation is clearly propounded. Yet, at the same time, I recognise a spectrum of clarity and specificity within the Bible such that some things are clearer than others, and that some conclusions may be held more tightly than others. Thus, while I expect to attain reasonable clarity as to the Pauline doctrine of adoption per se, discerning exactly how that doctrine relates to Christian spiritual formation entails a trajectory from 'more clear-and-specific' to 'less clear-and-specific.' A degree of modesty thus befits whatever conclusions I may reach.

1.7 Purpose and significance of the research

1.7.1 Purpose

The purpose of this research aligns with the primary research question, namely, to explore the ways in which the soteriological accomplishment of adoption bears upon the enterprise of Christian spiritual formation. Soteriological teaching that disproportionately emphasises only one aspect of salvation (e.g., justification) will inevitably stunt the spiritual formation of its hearers. This study seeks not to undermine the importance of justification, or any other soteriological metaphor, but rather to explore one metaphor, namely adoption, which clearly highlights the inherently transformative nature of Christian salvation.

1.7.2 Theological and practical significance

The theological significance of this research resides both in its contribution to the recent renaissance of the Pauline doctrine of adoption and in exploring the nexus between adoption, its Trinitarian accomplishment, and Christian spiritual formation.

The practical significance of this research is in its ambition to promote an understanding of the nature Christian salvation in which the spiritual formation of believers in Christlikeness is intrinsic. Furthermore, this study hopes to furnish Christian ministers with an understanding of how spiritual formation works and how the doctrine of adoption may be applied to the goal of formation in Christlikeness.

1.8 *Research design*

This research project is designed to move, by literary investigation and theoretical synthesis, from conceptual description to theological construction to theological application in four steps.

Step 1 is descriptive in that it aims to distil and summarise what the Pauline corpus teaches regarding the Trinitarian accomplishment of adoption. Step 2 is likewise descriptive in that it aims to report what theologians past have taught concerning the doctrine of adoption. Step 3 sees the transition from conceptual description to theological construction insofar as it aims to present a theology of adoption in such a way as highlights its potential for Christian spiritual formation. Step 4 requires a measure of conceptual description in setting out a theologically informed anthropology to which we may relate the soteriological accomplishment of adoption, followed by theological application as we show how adoption bears upon Christian spiritual formation.

1.9 *Research methodology*

This research is separated into four main steps following Smith's (2013, 49–56) configuration of Osborne's (2006, 406–409) approach to systematic theological formulation. While Osborne himself stops short of calling his approach a 'model' (preferring instead such terms as 'guideline' and 'approach'), Smith (2013, 49) configures Osborne's nine steps into a four-step 'model', which he calls the Osborne Comprehensive Model. Corresponding to the research design described in section 1.8 above, this research will follow the Osborne Comprehensive Model, with appropriate corresponding steps as described hereunder.

Step 1: An examination of biblical teaching

Step 1 will proceed as follows: (1) An investigation into the sociohistorical backgrounds most likely to have informed Paul's usage of the concept of adoption; (2) An analysis of the passages in which Paul uses the word "adoption" (i.e., Rom 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; and Eph 1:5) to determine the logic of each argument and the rhetorical function of the word "adoption" in each instance; and (3) An analysis of any actions and/or

purposes unique to the persons of God the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit in relation to the adoption of believers.

Resources to be consulted in step 1 will include the following: (1) Lexicons such as BDAG (2000–2002) and Louw and Nida (1996); (2) Theological dictionaries such as *NIDNTTE* (Silva 2014), *TDNTA* (Kittel, Friedrich and Bromiley, 1985), and *NDT* (Ferguson and Packer 2000); (3) Grammars such as Wallace (1996); (4) Bible commentaries such as Arnold (2010), Hoehner (2002), Moo (1996, 2013), Murray (1997), and Schreiner (2010, 2018); (5) Modern English Bible translations, principally the ESV; (6) Doctoral dissertations such as Heim (2014), Lin (2017), Mawhinney (1983), and Saito (2016); (7) Other works to be consulted may include published journal articles and relevant volumes in theological series such as the New Studies in Biblical Theology series.

Step 2: An examination of historical and contemporary theology

Step 2 will be an analysis of historical and contemporary theological works, examining how scholars past and present have treated the doctrine of adoption, and the extent to which they have noted its implications for Christian spiritual formation. This will be partly dialogical, and partly comparative; and will seek, ultimately, to discover both those ways in which the reflections of theologians past and present regarding the doctrine of adoption have been in harmony (or not) with biblical teaching, and whether or not those reflections have, over time, synthesised to form a coherent expression of the doctrine. This will entail examining how theologians have (1) treated the soteriological accomplishment of adoption; (2) identified the roles of the persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in relation to the adoption of believers; and (3) explicitly connected adoption and spiritual formation.

Resources to be consulted in step 2 include the following: (1) the writings of the patristic fathers found in *ANF* and *NPPF*; (2) Anselm's *Major Works* and Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* as representative of the medieval period; (3) Calvin's *Institutes* and selected *Commentaries*;¹² (4) John Knox's *Works* and Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic*

¹² Such a focus on Calvin is justified in view of the ubiquity of adoption in his theology (Gerrish 1993; Griffith 2001; Trumper 2001; Garner 2016). Noting this, some have argued that the lack of a dedicated chapter in his *Institutes* is explained by the fact that the doctrine pervades and informs

Theology as representative of the Post-Calvin Reformation and Reformed Scholasticism; (5) representative writings of the English Puritans—especially William Ames (e.g., *Marrow of Sacred Divinity* and *Substance of the Christian Religion*), William Perkins (in *Perkins' Works*), and Thomas Watson (e.g., *Body of Divinity*), who treated various aspects of adoption at some length;¹³ (6) Brakel's *The Christian's Reasonable Service* as representative of the Dutch Second Reformation; and finally (7) Burke's *Adopted into God's Family*, and Garner's *Sons in the Son* as the most important contemporary writings on the doctrine of adoption.

Step 3: Theological formulation

Step 3 will synthesise insights from steps 1 and 2 into a fresh presentation of the theology of adoption that both (1) captures the principal emphases of the doctrine as distilled in steps 1 and 2, and (2) highlights the potential application of the doctrine to the enterprise of Christian spiritual formation. Step 3 will engage mainly with Vanhoozer's *Drama of Doctrine* (2005).

Step 4: Implications

Step 4 will develop the results of step 3 via a minor adaptation of Osborne's method, which is appropriate to the objective of this study. Osborne requires the implications of our theological formulation for other doctrines and related practice to be examined. This study will, more narrowly, correlate the theological formulation of step 3 with both scriptural (specifically Pauline) teaching and contemporary literature on spiritual formation. In particular, Willard's *Renovation of The Heart* (2002).

the whole to the extent that "the adoption of believers is at the heart of John Calvin's understanding of salvation" (Griffith 2001, 135).

13 A study of adoption in the works of the English Puritans is likewise justified. Though not as developed as their treatments of closely related doctrines such as justification or assurance, adoption was sufficiently important in their theological construction to warrant a separate chapter in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*—the first inclusion of the doctrine of adoption in a major confessional statement (cf. Beeke and Jones 2012, Ch. 34, loc. 20434–20448). These three are selected for specific focus as they are regarded as having given the most ample treatment to adoption in their extant written works (Beeke and Jones 2012, Ch. 34:loc. 20434).

CHAPTER 2

ADOPTION IN THE PAULINE CORPUS

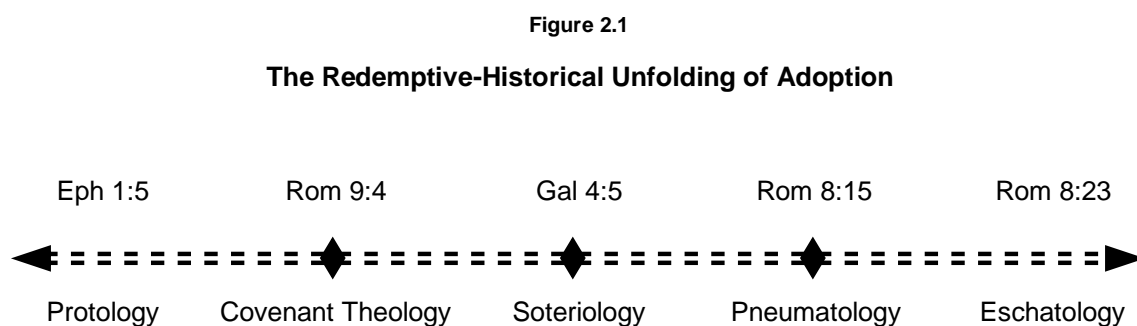
2.1 *Introduction*

This chapter relates to our first subsidiary question and aims to describe and summarise what the Pauline corpus teaches about the soteriological accomplishment of adoption and the purposes and actions of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in relation to it.

The chapter begins with a high-level survey of the relevant Pauline texts, showing that the metaphor of adoption serves not merely as *another* metaphor, but as an *organising* metaphor within Pauline soteriology. The characteristics and functions of metaphors in general are then introduced before investigating the sociohistorical background most likely to have informed Paul's usage of the metaphor of adoption. The bulk of the chapter consists of analyses of the passages in which Paul employs the metaphor of adoption. These analyses have two foci: first, to determine the rhetorical function of the adoption metaphor in the context of each discourse, and second, to describe any actions and/or purposes unique to the persons of God the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit in relation to the adoption of believers.

2.2 *Adoption as an organising soteriological metaphor*

Paul is the only New Testament author that uses the word *υιοθεσία* (adoption), and he does so only five times (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman 1998, 14–15; Hamilton 1997:363).¹⁴ Yet a high-level overview of how he employs it, as illustrated in Figure 2.1 (Trumper 2001, 3) below, reveals a theological significance beyond that which the frequency of its use would suggest:



Paul begins by giving us a glimpse behind the curtains of time, explaining that God the Father chose believers “before the foundation of the world ... for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:4–5).¹⁵ Next we see this eternal purpose being worked out in time through God’s covenant dealings with Old Testament Israel. Of all the riches that were theirs—the “covenants, the ... law, the worship, the promises ... the patriarchs”—adoption fronts the list (Rom 9:4–5). From the race of Israel came Christ (Rom 9:5), to “redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:5). Having received the “Spirit of adoption as sons” (Rom 8:15), we—the “sons of God” (Rom 8:14)—no longer live under the tyranny of sin but instead are “led by the Spirit of God” (Rom 8:14). But freedom from the penalty of sin (cf. Gal 4:5) and from the power of sin (cf. Rom 8:14–15) does not mean that we are yet free of the

¹⁴ Though Paul does speak of having become Onesimus’s father (Phlm 10), he does not use the word *υιοθεσία*, and the idea of adoption is not in view. Rather, Paul has in mind something akin to his relationship with the Corinthian believers, which he describes in terms denoting familial affection—they are his “beloved children” and he their “father in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (1 Cor 4:14–15). Again, though the word *υιοθεσία* is not used, the resulting status of sonship is in view in Paul’s employment of the Old Testament sonship motif in his admonition to the Corinthians (2 Cor 6:18). Though this passage is beyond the scope of our study, we nevertheless note that it is upon the foundation of sonship that Paul rests such strong ethical exhortations.

¹⁵ Unless otherwise stated, all quotations of Scripture are taken from the ESV.

presence of sin and the experience of suffering in a sin-scarred creation. But, though we suffer now, we do so in the certain knowledge of the consummation of our “adoption as sons” (Rom 8:23), when we—together with all creation—will be free of the “bondage to corruption” (Rom 8:21).

We see, therefore, that the metaphor of adoption embraces all of salvation history from the pre-temporal to the eschatological. This all-embracing soteriological scope has led Burke (2006, 41), Ferguson (2017, 586), and Garner (2002, 243) to conclude that adoption serves not merely as *another* of Paul’s metaphors, but as an *organising* metaphor for salvation.

We note further that Paul’s understanding of adoption appears to be intertwined with such themes as election (Eph 1:4), predestination (Eph 1:5), covenant (Rom 9:4), redemption (Gal 4:5), union with Christ (Eph 1:5), the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:15), and the eschatological redemption of our physical bodies (Rom 9:23). Thus, it seems this metaphor bears theological freight considerably greater than its word count. Before examining Paul’s employment of the metaphor of adoption specifically, it is necessary to understand what a metaphor is and how it functions generally.

2.3 *Metaphor: Definition and function*

Metaphoric language is a common feature of ordinary spoken and written communication. This study shall rely upon the following working definition: A metaphor is “that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another” (Soskice 1985, 15). The main function of metaphoric language is well understood. Linguists Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 154) explain that metaphors provide “understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another kind of experience.” In accordance with this description, understanding is transferred from the *source* domain to the *target* domain. In the case of Paul’s adoption metaphor, these domains may be represented as follows (adapted from Burke 2006, 34):

Figure 2.2

Source and Target Domains in Paul's adoption metaphors

<i>Source domain</i>	<i>Target domain</i>
Ancient family	The family of God
Human father	God
Adopted sons	Christian believers

Paul means us to understand something about the Christian's relationship to God by drawing from our understanding of the relationship of a human father to his adopted son in the ancient world. There is, however, a hindrance to our understanding, namely, that the practice of adoption in the twenty-first century is not what it was in the ancient world. The associations triggered in our minds when we speak of adoption derive from our source domain (i.e., adoption practices in the twenty-first century) and not from the source domain Paul had in mind when employing the metaphor over two thousand years ago. If we are not careful, this may lead us to err by importing unintended associations into the target domain. It is therefore necessary to examine the source domain Paul had in mind. To that end, we must ask which of the practices and understandings of adoption present at the time of Paul's writing were most likely to have informed his choice of the metaphor.

2.4 Adoption practices and understandings in the ancient Mediterranean world

Since adoption is a sociolegal practice, it is reasonable to assume that Paul drew from one or more of the three main sociolegal systems known to him, namely Jewish, Greek, and Roman (Llyall 1981, 82). We shall examine each in turn but note first two prefatory matters.

First, a recent study by Lin (2017) has proposed an alternative source of the metaphor, namely Paul's Damascus road experience (cf. Acts 9:1–9). Paul, Lin (2017, 28–32) argues, received his gospel directly from the risen Christ (Gal 1:15–16; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:3, 8; 2 Cor 4:4–6), and when he made his defence before King Agrippa (Acts 26) he

explicitly stated that the content of his preaching was that which he had received from the Lord (26:16). Lin (2017, 32) categorises that content as including a transfer of status from darkness to light, and from the dominion of Satan to God (26:18), an ethical admonition to perform deeds appropriate to repentance (26:20), and the promise of an inheritance (26:18). These three themes, namely transfer of status, ethical admonition, and inheritance are “all key themes in Romans within which adoption is employed by Paul to make his argument more comprehensible” (ibid.). Thus, Lin concludes, Paul received his adoption metaphor directly from Christ.

In response, we note that there is a sense in which Lin’s proposal holds. In his letters, Paul was expressing soteriological realities and not theological abstractions. The gospel that he received by direct revelation was a single reality; ‘adoption’, ‘redemption’ and ‘justification’ do not denote intrinsically different realities. They merely emphasise distinguishable aspects thereof. Thus, there is a sense in which it is right to say that all that Paul preached he had received on the Damascus road.

Yet, in another sense, Lin’s proposal doesn’t help us. Whatever Paul received from the Lord still needed to be communicated to others, and for this, understandable language was needed. Paul still had to select particular words, and the words chosen needed to be accessible to his audience. Indeed, the fact that Paul employed the adoption metaphor only in his letters to churches under Roman rule, namely those churches in Rome, Galatia, and Ephesus, indicates a deliberate consideration of how particular words would be understood in different contexts (cf. 1 Cor 9:19–23). It is a stretch to think that Lin would apply the same logic to Paul’s other metaphors. Just those that we have mentioned above (i.e., redemption and justification) emphasise aspects of the gospel against the source domains of the slave market and the courtroom respectively. To say that these sociocultural source domains are less relevant because Paul received his gospel by direct revelation is simply a non-starter. In conclusion, though Lin is correct to remind us that Paul’s gospel was received (1 Cor 15:3) and not of his own invention, a metaphor still needs to be understood against its source domain, and an examination of Jewish, Greek, and Roman adoption practices is in order.¹⁶

¹⁶ A fact Lin acknowledges, as he “allow[s] for both Jewish and Greco-Roman factors as possible influences” (Lin 2017, 29) on Paul’s application of the word *υιοθεσία* and devotes an entire chapter

Finally, we mind that our objective is not to ‘pick’ one background to the exclusion of the other—as if Paul could only have had *either* a Jewish *or* a Greek *or* a Roman model in mind. Indeed, antiquarian scholars have long recognised the multicultural dynamics of the first-century Mediterranean world, and recent scholarship (e.g., Engberg-Pedersen 2001, 1–4; Gorman 2004, 1) has begun to appreciate the extent to which these diverse cultures influenced one another. Contemporary New Testament scholars are less inclined to think of the relationship between Jewish and Greco-Roman sociocultural traditions of the first century as entirely dichotomous (Burke 2006, 47). Accordingly, our aim in this analysis is to understand how Paul drew from these varied sources to express a soteriological reality in a way that would be helpful to his hearers. We shall now examine the adoption practices of the ancient Jewish, Greek, and Roman worlds.

2.4.1 The practice of adoption and the notion of sonship in Old Testament Judaism

At first glance it may seem the ancient Jewish world made little contribution to Paul’s choice of the metaphor of adoption. Old Testament law contains no directives concerning the practice of adoption (Frymer-Kenski 2003, 1015). In fact, the word adoption does not even appear in the Old Testament—whether in its noun (adoption) or verb (adopt) forms (Hamilton 1997, 362). Longenecker (2014, 71) adds that no synonymous expression occurs in the Masoretic Text. The Greek word *υιοθεσία* (adoption) likewise does not appear in the LXX (BDAG, 1024, as confirmed by a Logos search for *υιοθεσία* in LXX, which returned no results). Moreover, none of the writings of later Judaism, such as the Jewish pseudepigrapha and the Dead Sea Scrolls, or even of the Hellenistic Jewish writers such as Philo and Josephus, contain any references to adoption as a sociolegal practice (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman 1998, 14; Lin 2017, 2). In what sense, then, might ancient Judaism have served as a source domain for Paul’s metaphor of adoption?

Two answers to this question have been proposed. First, Rossell (1952) and Scott (1992) have argued that, notwithstanding the absence of legal provisions governing adoption in ancient Israel, the practice was nevertheless known and understood.

of his doctoral thesis to unpacking various aspects of Roman—though interestingly not Jewish or Greek—adoption practices.

Second, Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman (1998, 14–15), Burke (2006, 50–55), and Heim (2014, 121–126) have posited that the sonship of Israel was a prominent theological motif of Old Testament Judaism that Paul, a Jew and an expert Old Testament scholar, could not but have drawn from. We shall examine each of these in turn.

2.4.1.1 The practice of adoption in Old Testament Judaism

The practice of adoption was well known in the ancient Near East. Of the 282 sections of *The Code of Hammurabi* (2008),¹⁷ nine (§§185–193, in Richardson 2004, 102–103) directly address adoption.¹⁸ While *Hammurabi* does not detail any legal procedures for adoption (as Greek and Roman law did), nevertheless, concern for the equitable and orderly preservation of the family and its estate is evident.¹⁹

The Nuzi Tablets²⁰ also contain evidence of the practice of adoption in Near Eastern society in the second millennium BC (Baeze 2016). HSS V 67.8, for example, details the allocation of the testator’s estate in the case where he has both a natural and an adoptive son (Speiser 1935, 436; cf. a similar case in the translation by C. J. Gadd in Meek 1969, 219–220). It must be noted, though, that the practice of adoption as indicated by the Nuzi tablets was often a legal mechanism by which a landowner could sell land outside of the family (a legally prohibited practice) by adopting the purchaser (Meek 1969, 220). Interestingly, EN 10/2 69 details the giving of a daughter to a new

17 *The Code of Hammurabi* was developed during the reign of Hammurabi (also known as Hammurapi), king of Babylon c. 1792–1750 BC. Hammurabi’s ambition was to gain control of the whole of Babylonia and the Euphrates region and to unite all of Mesopotamia under his rule. The Code is difficult to date with precision, but scholars posit that it was written in the later years of Hammurabi’s reign, probably c. 1760–1750 BC, and thus provides important insight into the sociolegal practices of much of the ancient Near East (Babcock, Hamme, and Strong 2016; Wiseman 1996, 442–443). References to sections of *The Code of Hammurabi* herein are to Richardson’s translation (Richardson 2004).

18 A further thirteen sections (*The Code of Hammurabi*, §§162–174, in Richardson 2004, 93–96) address legitimation, succession to inheritance, and other related matters.

19 This concern for equity is seen in, for example, a pair of corresponding provisions that stipulate that if an adoptive father has provided an education for his adopted son—if he has “[taught] him his craft” (*The Code of Hammurabi*, §188, in Richardson 2004, 103)—then the adopted son may not return to his biological father. Correspondingly, if an adoptive father has failed to provide an education for his adoptive son—if he has “not taught him his craft” (*The Code of Hammurabi*, §189, *ibid.*)—then the adopted son may return to his biological father.

20 The Nuzi Tablets are a collection of more than six thousand clay tablets excavated in North-eastern Iraq, near the modern city of Kirkuk, between 1925 and 1933. They include both public and private documents (e.g., labour contracts, deeds of sale, trial records, testamentary wills, etc.) dating to the fifteenth century BC and provide considerable insight into the daily life and customs of the ancient Near East (Baeze 2016).

mother (Justel 2011, 3), thus indicating that adoption in the ancient Near East was not exclusively patriarchal.²¹

Westbrook explains that the widespread practice of adoption in the ancient Near East had to do with its creation of legal status:

The relationship of parent and child is a natural, biological phenomenon. The concept of legitimacy, by contrast, is purely legal, the result of an artificial legal construct, namely marriage. A legitimate son or daughter is a person with certain recognised rights and duties in law—a legal status. Adoption is a legal fiction that creates the same legal status for persons who lack the biological qualification. The essential quality of adoption in the ancient Near East is that it did not merely create filiation, called “sonship” or “daughtership” in the native terminology; it created *legitimate* sonship or daughtership (in Westbrook 2003, 50–51, emphasis original).

Phillips seems to go too far in asserting that, in view of the prevalence of adoption in the ancient Near East, “it is inconceivable that it was not also undertaken in Israel” (Phillips 1973, 359). That said, it does seem likely that these practices were known to the patriarchs, and Rossell (1952) believes that it was just these that informed Abram’s alleged ‘adoption’ of his servant Eliezer (Gen 15:2). The Nuzi Tablets clearly attest a custom by which a childless couple would adopt a son, who thereupon assumed certain duties of care for the couple in their old age and, upon their death, became heir to their estate (Rossell 1952, 233–234).

There is, however, an important distinction between the customs of the ancient Near East and adoption as Paul envisages it in his letters. Whereas in Paul’s understanding adopted believers could never lose their inheritance—indeed, Paul calls those adopted “fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17), thereby implying that their inheritance is as secure as is Christ’s—the customs attested in both *Hammurabi* (cf. §191) and the Nuzi Tablets require the adopted heir to yield to any natural-born children should any be born to the couple after the adoption (Rossell 1952, 233–234; Pritchard 1969, 219–220).

21 Similarly AASOR 16 43, which stipulates that a girl given in adoption to a woman must be treated as a free citizen and not as a slave (Zaccagnini 2003, 578).

Furthermore, Westerbrook (2003, 53) explains, the familial relationship created in terms of these customs could be unilaterally dissolved by either party, and this simply cannot be squared with the sense of security inherent in Paul's usage. Indeed, having coupled adoption to predestination (Eph 1:5), Paul proceeds to couple adoption to glorification (Rom 8:15–17, 30). The understanding of adoption attested to by *Hammurabi* and the Nuzi Tablets cannot be reconciled with a relationship purposed in the mind of God before the foundation of the world and guaranteed by him into eternity. Thus, while ancient Near Eastern customs may have informed the relationship between Abram and Eliezer, it seems improbable that they informed Paul's use of the metaphor of adoption in his writings.

Further to Abram and Eliezer, Scott (1992) alleges three other instances of adoption in the Old Testament: Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48:5), Moses (Exod 2:10), and Esther (Esth 2:7). Scott argues that the verbal parallels between the three cases suggest a technical usage analogous to the marriage formula in 1 Samuel 25:42. Scott's argument may be illustrated as follows:

Figure 2.3

Verbal parallels between alleged instances of Old Testament adoption and an Old Testament marriage formula

<i>Alleged instances of adoption in the Old Testament</i>	
<i>(Emphasis added)</i>	
Gen 48:5	And now <i>your two sons</i> , who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, <i>are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine</i> , as Reuben and Simeon are.
Exod 2:10	When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and <i>he became her son</i> . She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."
Esth 2:7	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 <i>took her as his own daughter</i> .

<i>Old Testament marriage formula</i>	
<i>(Emphasis added)</i>	
1 Sam 25:42	And Abigail hurried and rose and mounted a donkey, and her five young women attended her. She followed the messengers of David and <i>became his wife</i> .

Scott contends that the syntactical parallels between the former three instances amount to a formulaic construction. Once this construction is recognised and held in juxtaposition to the marriage formulation of the latter text, Scott argues, the parallel extends beyond syntax to the creation of an “artificial kinship relationship” (Scott 1992, 75). Thus, according to Scott, these three are Old Testament instances of adoption.

Scott’s argument is not persuasive. In the case of Jacob and his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, Mace (1953) and Zuck (1996; both Mace and Zuck cited in Burke 2006, 200) believe Jacob—bearing in mind Joseph’s history with his brothers—was elevating them to equal status with his own sons in order to ensure rights of succession and inheritance (particularly with respect to the promised land) within the family. No one is added to the family. In Scott’s own language, no “artificial kinship relationship” (1992, 75) is created—thus, this does not appear to be an instance of adoption.

In the case of Moses and Pharaoh’s daughter, scholars believe this is more likely an instance of fosterage than of adoption since, notwithstanding the wealth and privilege Moses would have enjoyed under the care of Pharaoh’s daughter (cf. Heb 11:26), there is no indication of Moses attaining the rights of a child born into the family (cf. de Vaux 1962 and Lyall 1984, both cited in Burke 2006, 200). Furthermore, it is hard to see how a relational privilege that Moses so forcefully repudiated (cf. Heb 11:25) could have informed Paul’s employment of a metaphor intended to convey all the comforts of permanent familial status.

In Esther’s case it is also unlikely that adoption is in view. Israel was in exile in Persia and, though it is possible that Persian adoption laws could have been relied upon, the fact that the Jews held to their own laws (which did not include any provisions for adoption) in defiance of King Xerxes (cf. Esth 3:8) is a critical element of the narrative.

Furthermore, whatever relationship came to exist between Mordecai and Esther, it was not an “artificial kinship relationship” (Scott 1992, 75) as they were already kin.

In none of Scott’s three alleged instances of Old Testament adoption can it be established that artificial kinship relationships were created. The supposed juxtaposition of the marriage formula to the purported adoption formula does not hold, and the structure of Scott’s argument breaks down. Furthermore, the emphasis in Old Testament law is on the perpetuation of patriarchal lineage (e.g., Gen 38:8; Deut 25:5–6, 9–10) and not on the creation of artificial kinship relationships.

In sum, the Old Testament contains no provisions for adoption and no compelling evidence that the practice, though possibly known, had a meaningful influence on ancient Israelite society. It is therefore highly improbable that Old Testament law or ancient Jewish example influenced Paul’s use of the metaphor of adoption.

2.4.1.2 The notion of sonship in Old Testament Israel

Turning our attention now to the sonship motif of the Old Testament, we begin by noting the pervasiveness of the idea of a Father–son relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Yahweh refers to the nation of Israel as “my son” (Exod 4:22) and disciplines the nation “as a man disciplines his son” (Deut 8:5). The fact that “you are the sons of the LORD your God” is given as the basis for Israel’s call to holiness (Deut 14:1), and Israel’s neglect or forgetfulness of Yahweh as their Father is an important element of several rebukes (e.g., Deut 32:5–6; Isa 43:6–7; Mal 1:6, 2:10). It is in terms of a father’s love for his son that Yahweh laments Israel’s waywardness (Hos 11:1) and in those same terms that he exhorts Israel to the path of wisdom and blessing (Prov 3:11–12). A Father–son relationship is central to the Davidic covenant and kingship (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13, 22:10, 28:6; Ps 2:7) and is likewise in view in Israel’s repentance (Jer 31:9) and prayers for Yahweh’s mercy (Isa 63:16).

This non-exhaustive sampling is sufficient to demonstrate the importance of the sonship motif in the Old Testament. We shall now examine four of its most important occurrences—Exodus 4:22, Isaiah (various passages), Psalm 2:7, and Hosea 1:9—in more detail.

Exodus 4:22 records the first instance of Yahweh’s identification of the nation of Israel as “my son.” The Hebrew בן (son) most often refers to the immediate male physical descendant of a parent (Mangum 2014, s.v. Ancestry and Posterity: בן), though it could include male children by adoption or legitimation (Caragounis, 672).²² With reference to the exodus event, Yahweh not only refers to Israel as his son but also to himself as Israel’s אב (father, Deut 32:6). Ordinarily, “father” denotes someone’s physical male parent, though it can also refer to a more distant male ancestor (Mangum 2014, s.v. Ancestry and Posterity: אב). At issue is not the *fact* of a Father–son relationship between Yahweh and Israel—this is directly attested in the relevant texts—but rather the *basis* for this relational designation. Clearly, Yahweh is not Israel’s physical male parent; nor is he a distant male ancestor. In what sense, then, is this Father–son relationship to be understood?

Several commentators have designated this filial relationship as an *adoptive* one specifically (e.g., Davids 2001, 25; Knight 1998, 160), with one going so far as to claim that “[this] *adoptive* relationship between Yahweh and his people ... is foundational to the Old Testament” (Cook 1978, 138, emphasis added). It is, however, difficult to identify an exegetical foundation for this claim. The context seems to require that Israel’s sonship be understood in terms of election and redemption rather than of adoption. Indeed, just this understanding is expressed by both Moses and Isaiah in their reflections on the exodus rescue:

You are the *sons* of the LORD your God. ... For ... the LORD has *chosen* you (Deut 14:1–2, emphasis added).

You, O LORD, are our *Father*, our *Redeemer* from of old is your name (Isa 63:16, emphasis added).

The emphasis with respect to Yahweh’s salvific actions in the above passages falls on election and redemption. Garner (2016, 164) describes Israel’s sonship as, not *adoptive*, but *covenantal*. We shall see how this idea bears out in our exegesis of the

²² Though Caragounis tempers this claim by questioning the existence of adoption in Israel (cf. 1997, 672 and especially 676, “[adoption was] an institution that was probably unknown in Israel”).

Pauline texts in due course, but note for now that the notion of a covenantal sonship that *anticipated* adoptive sonship may prove valuable.

That said, even if adoption per se cannot be found in the exodus episode, that does not empty Yahweh's naming of Israel as "my son" of all filial meaning. In Pharaoh's reckoning Israel was nothing more than a possession (i.e., slave labour)—as evidenced by his calculation that granting their freedom would decrease economic production (cf. Exod 5:4–9). The Old Testament frequently affirms that Israel was, in fact, Yahweh's possession (e.g., Deut 7:6, 14:2; 26:18; Ps 135:4; Mal 3:17), and he could have engaged with Pharaoh on such terms—namely, as one *possessor* to another. Instead, God changes the terms. He does not instruct Moses to say to Pharaoh: "Israel is my *possession* ... let my *possession* go ... if you refuse ... I will [destroy] your *possessions*," but rather, "Israel is my firstborn *son* ... let my *son* go ... if you refuse ... I will kill your firstborn *son*" (Exod 4:22, emphasis added). Yahweh frames the confrontation with Pharaoh as between two fathers over the lives of their respective firstborn sons, not merely as between two sovereigns in a property dispute. Yahweh's introduction of terminology bespeaking fatherly love and protection may not prove anything with regard to adoption specifically, but it is not without filial content that would, very plausibly, have informed Paul's reflections on the soteriological foreshadowings of the exodus.

The sonship motif in Isaiah is less immediately apparent but no less significant. At face value, it does not appear Isaiah has much to say about Israel's sonship at all. Indeed, apart from one reference to the people of Israel as "sons" and "daughters" of the LORD (Isa 42:6), Isaiah nowhere speaks of Israel's sonship.²³ Instead, Isaiah develops Israel's relationship to the LORD as that of a chosen "servant" (cf. Isa 41:8, 9; 43:10; 44:1, 2; 45:4; 65:9). Importantly, however, the designation "servant" in Isaiah does not connote *servility*. Indeed, Isaiah's Servant par excellence is none other than God's only begotten Son (cf. the Servant Songs in Isa 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; and 52:13–53:12, which Jesus appropriates to himself in Luke 22:37). Thus we see that, although Isaiah directly couples *redemption* to a Father–son relationship (Isa 63:16), he does so only once, and the greater weight of emphasis is on the LORD's *election* of Israel to a

23 Though Israel is pictured as the LORD's nursing child in Isa 49:15.

servanthood that contains important filial overtones. This nexus of election, redemption, the Fatherhood of God, and the sonship of Israel is highly suggestive.

Further strengthening the case that the sonship motif informed Paul's thought is the fact that the pre-exodus declaration of Israel's sonship (i.e., Exod 4:22) becomes the basis of Israel's prayer for a restored relationship with Yahweh after the exile (cf. Isa 63:16; 64:8). As Wright observes:

The *father-son relationship* between Yahweh and Israel was a ground for hope and permanence, even when Israel stood among the wreckage of a broken covenant—a covenant, that is, broken by their own disobedience. The *sonship relationship* was something that survived the greatest disaster (Wright 1992, 126, emphasis added).

Thus, the sonship motif bespeaks not just rescue (as in the exodus), but permanence.

Turning our attention to Psalm 2, we recall that God had promised an enduring kingdom under the reign of a king who would be God's son (2 Sam 7:11–16). Against this background some have understood the king's declaration in Psalm 2:7—"The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you'"—as a decree of adoption (VanGemeren 2008, 95). Possibly underlying this interpretation is the ancient custom of covenants of grant. In terms of these, a donor adopted the donee and the thing granted took the form of an inheritance (Hamilton 1997, 363). In this instance, it is therefore proposed, God adopted David so as to legitimise his grant of a perpetual royal dynasty.

In response to this argument we note that, even if the covenant of grant is the right lens through which to view Psalm 2:7, the overall context is that of a coronation ceremony, not an adoption. Thus the (alleged) adoption appears merely incidental to the coronation and the grant therein entailed (cf. Ps 2:8). That said, whether or not Psalm 2 envisages adoption per se, it certainly does add an important nuance to the sonship motif, namely that Israel's messianic hopes were intertwined with the notion of sonship and had been since the very early days of the kingdom (*NIDNTTE*, 4:524).

Given that the intertestamental book *Wisdom of Solomon* contains numerous references to a father–son relationship between God and Israel,²⁴ and that Israel had waited a millennium in anticipation of a messianic king in whom the sonship foreshadowed in Psalm 2:7–8 would be fully realised, it is entirely plausible that the sonship motif had powerfully shaped the national psyche of Israel by Paul’s time. Furthermore, Heim (2014, 122–124) argues persuasively that Greek and Roman adoption practices had, by the first century, so informed Jewish consciousness that it is possible that a first-century Hellenistic understanding of adoption was read back into the Old Testament texts in which Israel is identified as Yahweh’s son.²⁵ Thus, notwithstanding that such an interpretation would have been foreign to the authors and original readers of the relevant Old Testament texts, nevertheless a national identity that comprehended Israel as Yahweh’s specifically *adopted* son had, by Paul’s day, begun to evolve.

Yet there remains one item of evidence that, in our opinion, and contra Heim (2014, 122–124), at least introduces the possibility that Old Testament Israel understood its sonship as specifically adoptive—even at the time the relevant texts were written, and not only by the first century. Shortly before the conquest of the Northern Kingdom, God commissioned Hosea to a dramatic prophecy, part of which entailed the giving of meaning-bearing names to his children. To the third of Hosea’s children—a son—God commanded that the name Loammi, which means “Not My People”, be given, and explained that he had commanded this name because “You [Israel] are not my people, and I am not your God” (Hos 1:9). The giving of this name using this specific form of words may be significant.

Westerbrook explains that, in terms of ancient Near Eastern law, the relationship created by adoption could be unilaterally dissolved by either party. The dissolution required merely a speech act, the specific form of which was “You are not my son/daughter” or “You are not my father (and/or mother),” as the case may be

24 Cf. *Wisdom of Solomon* 2:13, 16, 18; 5:5; 9:7; 12:7, 20; 16:10; 18:13; 19:6

25 Heim quotes Philo, Josephus, and the pseudepigraphal *Book of Jubilees*, all drawing on the semantic range of the word adoption, to describe Old Testament episodes in which adoption cannot be established by exegesis of the passages themselves. This suggests that “the use of Greek adoption terminology to denote artificially established kinship ... might have been fairly prevalent within first-century Judaism” (Heim 2014, 123).

(Westerbrook 2003, 53).²⁶ This very specific form of words is very close to those spoken by God in Hosea and may be an adoption formula. If it is an adoption formula, though, it is not without difficulty. Specifically, in his explanation to Hosea, God does not say “I am not your *Father*” but rather “I am not your *God*” (Hos 1:9, emphasis added). The form of words does not precisely correspond. This is not an insurmountable hurdle, though, as, in his own words, God does imply a Father–son relationship later in Hosea when he explains how he loved Israel as a son, rescued him from Egypt, carried him in his arms, and even bent down to feed him (Hos 11:1–4).

Later in the prophecy, God foretells a day when he will restore relationship with Israel and, once again, the words correspond to the prescribed form almost exactly: “I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God’” (Hos 2:23).²⁷ It is noteworthy that, on this occasion, the LORD described his relationship to Israel in a specific form of words that suggests they might have been informed by the sociocultural adoption practices of the ancient Near East.

Therefore, while we agree with Heim’s (2014, 122–124) proposal that, by the time the apostle Paul wrote his letters, readers of the Old Testament were likely to read first-century Greco-Roman adoption practices into texts in which the notion of adoption is not present,²⁸ we do want to leave open the possibility that an awareness of the adoption practices of the ancient Near East may have begun to infuse Israel’s understanding of its national sonship as specifically *adoptive* sonship—even in the pre-exilic period.

In summary, Old Testament law contains no provisions for the practice of adoption, and Old Testament narrative describes no unequivocal examples of adoption between human persons. These could not, therefore, have been formative influences in Paul’s use of the metaphor of adoption. On the other hand, the sonship motif of the Old

26 A similar form of words is attested in one of the Nuzi Tablets, in which a contract of slavery may be unilaterally terminated (with financial penalties) by speaking the words “We are not slave-women” (Speiser 1935, 434).

27 The seemingly erratic nature of this relationship—and specifically of the LORD’s commitment to it—is answered by the full testimony of Scripture. What is being expressed in Hosea is not the casual making-and-breaking-and-making-again of a relationship, but rather the zeal of the LORD overflowing in prophetic expression of his commitment to his covenant purposes in spite of Israel’s unfaithfulness.

28 An error Carson calls “semantic anachronism” (Carson 1996, 33).

Testament—in which there *may* be hints at an adoptive element—is theologically significant and appears to have become intrinsic to Jewish national identity by the time of the apostles. It is eminently probable, therefore, that the sonship motif—interwoven as it was with the notions of election and redemption—did influence Paul’s employment of the metaphor of adoption.

2.4.2 The practice and understanding of adoption in the ancient Greek world

Unlike Jewish culture, ancient Greek culture did have a formal institution of adoption. Crispin-Moore (1989, 216) argues that Hellenistic law strongly influenced Paul’s legal metaphors generally and his adoption metaphor in particular. Indeed, evidence dating to the fourth century BC attests that adoption was a recognised means of reconfiguring kinship structures in Greek society (cf. Hodge 2007, 29).

A difficulty in evaluating Greek practices as a potential source domain for Paul’s metaphor of adoption, however, is the fact that Greek civilisation at the time consisted of autonomous city-states with autonomous legal systems such that there existed no single body of Greek law. Lyall (1981, 83) suggests it would be more accurate to speak not of ‘Greek law’ but of ‘the laws of Greeks’.

As this diversity relates to adoption specifically, Mawhinney (1983, 14) notes the differences in the adoption practices indicated in the speeches of Isaeus and Demosthenes, which describe Athenian customs, and those indicated by the Cretan *Code of Gortyn*. Thus, one is bound to ask what confidence a first-century, for example, Roman reader of Paul’s letters might have had in interpreting a metaphor constructed against, for example, an Athenian source domain?

While it is true that some elements of Greek adoption practices could have provided source material to Paul—for example the fact that a foreigner, once adopted by a Greek citizen, became subject to the laws of the city-state as if they were a natural-born citizen (cf. Demosthenes 1939a, *Speeches 21–30, Against Meidias*, para. 149–150)—other features present meaningful problems to Pauline usage. First, adoption did not entail the severing of the original familial relationship. In fact, an adopted son retained the legal prerogative to return to the family of his natural father (Isaeus, *Speech 6, On the Estate of Philoctemon*, para. 44). The relational transience therein suggested is irreconcilable with either the permanence suggested by the sonship motif

of the Old Testament or the salvific security suggested in Paul's use of the metaphor. Second, Greek law stipulated that a father could not adopt if he already had a legal heir (Demosthenes 1939b, *Speeches 41–50, Against Stephanus 2*, para. 14). This cannot be squared with Paul's teaching that, having been adopted by God, believers become heirs of God "and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17).

For these reasons, even though it is likely that Paul was familiar with Greek adoption practices,²⁹ scholars (e.g., Burke 2006, 58–60; Garner 2016, 37; Lyall 1981, 83) are reluctant to give the hypothesis of a Greek source domain much credence. Nevertheless, what Greek sociolegal adoption practices did reveal was a concern for family, lineage, and inheritance.³⁰ Such concerns are common to many societies and cultures—not least to the ancient Roman world, which Lyall (1981, 84) posits as "the best evidenced" of the options for Paul's source domain. To this we now turn our attention.

2.4.3 The practice and understanding of adoption in the ancient Roman world

Before we examine their adoption practices, it will be helpful to understand something of the values and structure of the ancient Roman family—in particular, the concept of *patria potestas* (i.e., paternal power). Under Roman law the family patriarch (i.e., the oldest living male), called the *paterfamilias*, was the only member of the family recognised as a full juristic person (Kroeger 1993, 376–377). As such, he held *patria potestas*—absolute legal authority over every member of his family. Family members could not possess property in their own right, nor were they free to marry, nor to choose their own religion without the permission of the *paterfamilias*. The *paterfamilias* was legally accountable for any crimes committed by a member—even an adult member—of his family. He had authority to sell family members into slavery, and even to put them to death. Though later laws diminished the reach of *patria potestas*, at the time of the apostle Paul the legal power of the *paterfamilias* within the Roman family unit

29 Paul was a native of Tarsus—a cosmopolitan Roman colony with a mix of Greek and Oriental influences (cf. Blaiklock 1996, 1154).

30 Commercial concerns are also evident in the adoption practices of the ancient Greek world—as they were in the ancient Near East. For example, in his speech *Against Leptines*, Demosthenes advances the interests of Leucon, who was "a foreigner by birth, though by adoption an Athenian citizen" and an important benefactor of the city (Demosthenes 1926, *Speeches 11–20, Against Leptines*, para. 30).

was absolute and constrained only by sociocultural mores (Mawhinney 1983, 29; Davidson 2016, under “Historical context of Father”).

Ordinarily speaking, the chief concern of the *paterfamilias* was for the management of the family’s assets, honour, and cult; and he exercised *patria potestas* mainly to those ends. A particular responsibility of the *paterfamilias* was to pass both the estate and his *potestas* to a suitable heir upon his death, and to this end adoption was a well-recognised means (Heim 2014, 131).

This concern for the honour of the *paterfamilias* must not be missed. Though secondary motives did exist (cf. Kurylowicz 1981, 50), adoption as a Roman social practice was primarily concerned for the honour of the *paterfamilias*; it was not (usually) an extension of mercy to a needy child (Peppard 2011, 59–60). As Peppard has noted:

At issue were his [i.e., the *paterfamilias*] name, his wealth, his status, and his sacred rites; without a son, his divine spirit (*genius*) would perish. One could say that all laws led to the Roman father (Peppard 2011, 60).³¹

The institution of adoption existed principally to serve the honour of the *paterfamilias* via his estate and cult. The importance attached to the honour of the *paterfamilias*—even beyond his life—seems peculiar to the modern (especially Western) mind. But within the worldview of the ancient Roman family, the ‘spirit’ (called the *genius* or *numen*) of the family was the object of family worship and was essential to the prosperity of the family, and the *paterfamilias* was the living embodiment of that spirit. This placed an obligation on the adopted son such that not only was he bound to preserve the assets of the family he had been made a part of, but he became the custodian—indeed the embodiment himself—of the family spirit (Burke 2006, 66).

Having considered something of the structure and values of the ancient Roman family and how those informed adoption as a sociocultural phenomenon, we now turn our attention to the legal codes that gave shape to the practice.

³¹ A further point to take note of is the specific focus on a *son* as heir of both the estate and the *potestas*. Under Roman law, women could not possess *potestas* (Kroeger 2000, 1277) and thus would not be suitable candidates for adoption, given that the primary objective was the preservation and extension of the honour of the *paterfamilias*.

Roman law stipulated two forms of adoption: *adoptio* (or *adoptatio*) and *adrogatio* (Morris 2016). The essential distinction between the two was that *adoptio* regulated the transfer of a person from the authority of one *paterfamilias* to the authority of another *paterfamilias*, whereas *adrogatio* regulated the submission of a person who was himself a *paterfamilias* to the authority of another *paterfamilias*.

Adrogatio involved one *paterfamilias* submitting himself to another. This was not merely a relational submission, but a legal surrender of his own *patria potestas* to another. The implications of *adrogatio* were very serious: one family line came to an end. The estate was transferred to the *potestas* of the adopting *paterfamilias*; the former family cult was formally rejected in a public ceremony and the new family cult embraced; and the man adopted even surrendered *patria potestas* over his own children to the new *paterfamilias* (Mawhinney 1983, 29–30; Burke 2006, 67). Because *adrogatio* carried such serious implications, the laws governing it were very stringent. First, only a man with no biological children could adopt by *adrogatio*. Second, an application for *adrogatio* could be considered and approved only by the *comitia curiata*—a civic council convened only in the capital city of Rome itself and presided over by the *Pontifex Maximus*, the Chief High Priest of the College of Pontiffs (Aune 2000, 922; Watson 2000, 974; Morris 2016; Mawhinney 1983, 30).

The apostle Paul would certainly have known of *adrogatio*. Tiberius Caesar, who ruled as emperor from AD 14 to AD 37 (i.e., shortly before the time of the apostle Paul's ministry), succeeded his stepfather Augustus Caesar by way of *adrogatio* (Judge 1996, 1186).³² Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the *adrogatio* model was foremost in the apostle's mind as he developed his adoption metaphor. First, the practice of *adrogatio* was, for the reasons outlined above, uncommon (cf. Walters 2003, 53)—a fact that diminishes its usefulness as a metaphoric source domain. Second, the practice of *adrogatio* was extended beyond the city of Rome to the rest of the Empire only during the reign of Diocletian (c. AD 284–305), more than two centuries after Paul wrote his letters. It seems unlikely that Paul would have employed a metaphor in his letters to the Galatian and Ephesian churches that required familiarity with a source domain

32 In fact, the entire Julio-Claudian line for almost a century around the New Testament era came to power by adoption: Julius Caesar adopted Octavian (Augustus) (27 BC–AD 14), who adopted Tiberius (AD 14–37), who adopted Gaius (Caligula) (AD 37–41), who adopted Claudius (AD 41–54), who adopted Nero (AD 54–68)—though not all by *adrogatio* (Burke 2006, 62–63).

outside of their experience. Finally, as the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ is clearly present in Paul's writing,³³ it is difficult to imagine that he would have selected a model that applied only in cases where the adopting *paterfamilias* had no children of his own.

Adoptio (or *adoptatio*) was the more common form of adoption in the Roman Empire and involved the transfer of a person from the *potestas* of one *paterfamilias* to the *potestas* of another. Thus, the implications, for both the adoptee and his family of origin, were less serious. Whereas by *adrogatio* the adoptee's legal status changed from being *in potestas* (i.e., legally independent) to being *sub potestas* (i.e., legally dependant), by *adoptio* the adoptee was *sub potestas* in his family of origin and remained so in his new family. *Adoptio* was, in that respect, a lateral move. Furthermore, *adoptio* did not (legally, if not practically) affect the continuation of the family line of the adoptee's family of origin. For these reasons, *adoptio* was procedurally less onerous than *adrogatio*. It involved a private transaction between the natural *paterfamilias* and the adoptive *paterfamilias* and required only the presence of witnesses (as opposed to the approval of the *comitia curiata*), one of whom needed to be a government official, and could thus occur anywhere in the Empire, provided a magistrate was present (Mawhinney 1983, 30–31; Scott 1992, 12; Burke 2006, 69).

To say that the legal consequences of *adoptio* were less serious than those of *adrogatio*, however, is not to say that the existential consequences were trivial. The adoptee's outstanding debts (if any) were cancelled, and he acquired the social status of his new *paterfamilias*.³⁴ Furthermore, because the adoptee was *sub potestas* in his natural family, his own children were also *sub potestas* with respect to the natural *paterfamilias* and, because only the adoptee was transferred to the *potestas* of the adoptive *paterfamilias*, his children remained in his natural family (Mawhinney 1983, 31). Mawhinney does not overstate the case in saying, "An old way of life was left behind and a new life was begun" (Mawhinney 1983, 29).

33 Philippians 2:5–11 is key in this regard. The statement in vv. 10–11 that every knee will bow and every tongue confess the Lordship of Christ is taken from Isa 45:23, which is itself at the centre of chs. 45 and 46 of Isaiah—a passage in which Jesus is clearly identified with the God who is "I am" (Isa 45:22) and who declares the end from the beginning.

34 Hence the advice of Roman statesman-philosopher Seneca (c. 4 BC–AD 65) to young men being pursued for adoption that they "inquire how many ancestors the old man who seeks him has, what rank they are, and what the old man's wealth is" (quoted in Heim 2014, 134).

In summary, we may say that *adoptio* was “almost certainly [what] Paul had in mind” (Dunn 1993, 217) when developing his metaphor. That said, there is a risk in pressing the correspondence too far. Several features of *adoptio* will help us understand Paul’s use of the metaphor when we come to our exegesis, but it would be an overstatement to claim a one-to-one match between every element of *adoptio* and Paul’s adoption metaphor (contra Hester 1968, 60–62).

2.4.4 Conclusion

Having examined the adoption practices of the ancient Jewish, Greek, and Roman worlds, we are now in a position to draw together some of the threads of discovery thus far.

The sonship motif of the Old Testament—ubiquitous as it is, and intrinsic as it had become to Jewish national identity—could not but have been formative to Paul’s theological thought. In his letters, though, Paul was not postulating theological abstractions. He was expressing soteriological realities, and these required a vocabulary capable of connecting with the multicultural first-century Mediterranean world. To this end, Dutch missiologist J. H. Bavinck proposes what he calls “*possessio*, to take in possession” (Bavinck 1960, 178). He explains:

The Christian life does not accommodate or adapt itself to heathen forms of life, but it takes the latter in possession and thereby makes them new (Bavinck 1960, 178).

The sociocultural practice of adoption was a well-known ‘form of life’ in the Greco-Roman world—and one most fitting to ‘take in possession.’ To that end, the Roman legal framework of *adoptio* provided a particularly apt source domain from which to develop a soteriological metaphor.

That said, we do not believe it was Paul’s intention to communicate a precise one-to-one correspondence between every element of the Roman practice of *adoptio* and the soteriological reality he wished to express. As Heim (2014, 135–136) argues, the source domain of a metaphor is intended to provide only the conceptual foundation upon which new meaning is built. To quote:

The beauty of the metaphor lies in the indeterminacy of its evocation
(Heim 2014, 135).

We can imagine, for example, that when the first recipients of the letter to the Galatian churches heard it read that “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son ... so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4–5), one turned to another and remarked: “Adopted as sons! That sounds amazing. I wonder exactly what it means?”

Shared cultural knowledge of the source domain would have provided a starting point, but the nuances of precisely *how* Paul used the metaphor in that context are what would have completed their understanding. To understanding those nuances we now turn in our exegesis.

2.5 *The Pauline adoption loci*

We shall examine the five passages in the sequence illustrated by Figure 2.1, namely: Ephesians 1:5 (Protology); Romans 9:4 (Covenant Theology); Galatians 4:5 (Soteriology); Romans 8:15 (Pneumatology); and Romans 8:23 (Eschatology).

2.5.1 Ephesians 1:5

Within the protological-eschatological framework noted above, Ephesians 1:5 reveals the ultimate foundation of adoption: “[The Father] predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.”

2.5.1.1 Structure, discourse, and rhetoric

Ephesians 1:5 forms part of a larger unit, namely Ephesians 1:3–14. In the Greek this unit is a single, complex sentence of 202 words. And complex it certainly is. A century’s worth of research saw no fewer than 43 proposals as to the form (i.e., Is it a liturgical hymn? A doxology? Something else?) and structure of this passage.³⁵ As to the form, Arnold (2010, under Ch. 2, “Literary context”, loc. 1677) and Hoehner (2002, 159) both characterise the passage as a eulogy or *barakah*.³⁶ We consider that this descriptor

35 Hoehner (2002, 153–161) presents an overview of proposals spanning the years 1904 to 2001.

36 The Jewish *barakah* was a prayer of worship often used in liturgical settings (Wilkins 1997, 943).

fits hand-in-glove with the structure of the passage, in which Paul eulogises God specifically as the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 3).

Having marked the passage with a Trinitarian stamp from the outset, and following the conjunction καθὼς (even as, v. 4a, to which we shall return shortly), the remainder of the passage develops the Trinitarian schema in stanzas focusing in turn on the Father (vv. 4–6), the Son (vv. 7–12), and the Holy Spirit (vv. 13–14) respectively. Stott (1979, 33) objects that “this is rather too neat to be probable.” On the contrary, we believe that in addressing a letter “to the saints” (v. 1)—as opposed to ‘to the scholars’—Paul would have felt no embarrassment in using a simple, and obvious, literary structure to aid memory and understanding. Furthermore, each stanza concludes with the refrain “to the praise of his glory/glorious grace” (v. 6, 12, 14)—thereby repeatedly directing praise to “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 1), which is the main objective of the entire eulogy (Hoehner 2002, 162).

Paul’s exclamation of praise (v. 3) relates to the ensuing three stanzas by means of the adverbial conjunction καθὼς (even as, v. 4). Arnold (2010, loc. 1710–1757) follows BDAG (493–494) in understanding καθὼς as a causal conjunction (i.e. because) in this context, whereas most English Bibles concur with Wallace (1996, 674–675) and translate it in a comparative sense (i.e. “even as” in the ASV, ESV, and RSV; “just as” in the ISV, LEB, NASB, NKJV, and NRSV; “according as” in Darby, KJV, and YLT.)³⁷ Arnold and BDAG’s understanding of the conjunction renders the logic of the eulogy as follows: Blessed be ... God: first, *because* ... [he ordained our salvation, vv. 4–6]; second, *because* (implied) [he accomplished our salvation, vv. 7–12]; and third, *because* (implied) [he has sealed our salvation, vv. 13–14]. In other words, the three stanzas beyond the “because” provide the reasons Paul praises—and we should praise—God. In Wallace’s proposal, καθὼς “tells how something is to be done” (Wallace 1996, 674–675), and in this context it yields the logic of the eulogy as follows: Blessed be ... God ... who has blessed us in Christ ... *even as* (i.e., *in this manner*) ... [he ordained our salvation, vv. 4–6], [he accomplished our salvation, vv. 7–12], and [he sealed our salvation, vv. 13–14]. In other words, the three stanzas following “even as” flesh out the manner in which God has blessed us. The Father’s choosing, the Son’s

37 The HCSB and NIV being the notable exceptions in rendering “for.”

sacrificing, and the Spirit's sealing are the content of the spiritual blessings with which we are blessed.

That said, favouring the comparative interpretation need not exclude the causal. If we accept the logic yielded by the comparative rendering, as proposed above, there remains a causal dimension in that the electing to salvation of the Father, the accomplishment of salvation by the Son, and the sealing to salvation by the Spirit are not only in themselves the spiritual blessings for which Paul praises God; they are also the basis for every spiritual blessing the believer enjoys (cf. Hoehner 2002, 175).

A detailed analysis of every aspect of this eulogy is beyond the scope of this study. Our interest is focused on how the metaphor of adoption functions within the eulogy. With that in mind, we note first that it is the language of adoption that ties all three stanzas together. In the first, it is to "adoption as sons" (v. 5) that the Father predestined us. In the second, ἐκκληρώθημεν (an inheritance, v. 11) in the Son is what we have obtained as a result of that predestination. In the third, it is the full eschatological realisation of "our inheritance" (v. 14) that the Spirit guarantees. This is not to deny other spiritual blessings (e.g., redemption and forgiveness, v. 7) present in the eulogy. It is, however, noteworthy that it is in the language of adoption specifically, and the accompanying benefits of sonship, that Paul mines the treasures of the Trinitarian nature of salvation.

The idea of inheritance in the passage requires some consideration. In verse 11 the Greek word is ἐκκληρώθημεν, and in verse 14 it is κληρονομίας. The former developed through time from the initial idea of 'casting lots' (in the sense that the casting of lots was indicative of the divine will) to that of an 'allotted portion' and finally to an 'inheritance'. In the Old Testament, inheritance is frequently entwined with the idea of the promised land as Yahweh's gift to Israel (Foerster 1985, 442). Against this background, and noting that "we have obtained" is in the passive, the idea seems to be that it is the Father's assignment, or allotment, of the inheritance to those adopted "in [Christ]" that "guarantees the legitimacy of [their] possession" of it (ibid.). Recalling the ancient custom of covenants of grant³⁸—in terms of which a donor adopted the

38 See discussion on Psalm 2:7 at §2.4.1.2 herein.

donee and the thing granted took the form of an inheritance—it appears that although the word υιοθεσία is not present in the second stanza, the idea certainly is.

The latter use of “inheritance”—κληρονομίας in verse 14—though related to the former, has a different emphasis. Whereas ἐκληρώθημεν in verse 11 emphasised the legitimacy of the possession of the thing received, the noun κληρονομία in verse 14 denotes the thing possessed—the inheritance, or property, itself—in this case: “transcendent salvation” (BDAG, 547–548). Again, though the word υιοθεσία does not feature in the third stanza, the reality of it is assumed as the basis for the legitimate possession of the κληρονομία.

Stepping back from the detail to the bigger picture of this passage, we note that it is the conceptual framework of adoption to sonship (and its benefits, namely, the legitimate possession of an eternal inheritance) that Paul considers adequate to bear the weight of the unfolding of the purposes of God through the ages of eternity. And this both with respect to his elect and to himself.

With respect to the elect: their salvation was determined beyond time as predestination to sonship via adoption (vv. 4–6); accomplished in time as an inheritance already legitimately possessed (vv. 7–12); and secured for all time as the fullness of inheritance yet to be realised (vv. 13–14).

With respect to himself: the Father’s choosing of some to adoption as sons is to “the praise of his glorious grace” (v. 6); the Son’s securing of their inheritance “through his blood” (v. 7) is likewise “to the praise of his glory” (v. 12); and the Spirit’s sealing of the adopted unto the full realisation of their inheritance is, again, “to the praise of his glory” (v. 14). Thus, while the ultimate aim of salvation is the praise of the glory of God, it meets this aim in the triune triumph of adoption (cf. Garner 2002, 59).

Therefore, adoption functions within the rhetoric of this passage as the pre-eminent soteriological accomplishment that serves, with respect to the believer, as that which conveys the content of the spiritual blessings with which the believer is blessed and, with respect to the Father, as that for which the glory of the Father is to be praised.

2.5.1.2 Trinitarian purposes and actions

Having noted the Trinitarian structure of this passage, we now proceed to describe any actions and/or purposes unique to the persons of the Trinity in relation to the accomplishment of adoption.

With respect to the Father, Paul tells us that he προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν (predestined us for adoption, v. 5). The participle προορίσας (predestined) is used only six times in the New Testament. In two of those cases (Acts 4:28; 1 Cor 1:27), it has a thing as its object, and in four (Rom 8:29, 30; Eph 1:5, 11), persons are the object. Hoehner notes that, in the instances where persons are the objects of predestination, there are two accusatives; the Father has predestined *somebody* to or for *something* (Hoehner 2002, 193). In Ephesians 1:5 we see that the Father took an action (he “predestined”) before time (“before the foundation of the world,” v. 4), which action was efficacious for persons within time (“us”) and the effects of which shall endure beyond time (“for adoption”). Thus, it is the Father who ordained the adoption of believers.

It is worth noting briefly that it is ἡμᾶς (us, v. 5) that the Father ordains to adoption. In context ἡμᾶς here refers to Paul and the saints in Ephesus. We should understand this to refer to all those who are “in Christ” (v. 1)—but only to those “in Christ.” Not all are predestined to adoption; some remain “children of wrath” (Eph 2:3) under the *potestas* of the natural *paterfamilias* of all mankind, namely the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:1). The Father’s ordaining to adoption is selective; there is a “choosing” (ἐξελέξατο, Eph 1:4) at work in his ordaining.

The determining control of the Father’s ἐξελέξατο ([choosing], i.e., chose, v. 4) is given emphasis via the accumulation of related words in this passage: εὐδοκίαν (purpose, v. 5, 9); προορίσας (predestined, v. 5, 11); θελήματος (will, v. 5, 9, 11); βουλήν (counsel, v. 11); and πρόθεσιν (purpose, v. 11). BDAG explains that ἐξελέξατο (v. 4) indicates a choice made in accordance with a personal preference; that is, to “select someone/something for oneself” (BDAG, 305), and that it is often used together with an indication of the purpose for which the choice is made, as is the case in this context.

Determinative as the Father’s purpose is, we must not think of his purpose purely as a matter of dry resolve. Louw and Nida explain that εὐδοκίαν (purpose, v. 5) expresses “that which pleases someone” (1996, §25.88). Hence, various English translations

render the phrase in verse 5 “according to the good pleasure of his will” or similar (e.g., CSB, KJV, NIV, and NKJV).³⁹ In other words, the Father purposes that which pleases him. He does indeed resolve, but he resolves only that which accords with his pleasure. The Father is subject to no external direction or constraint in predestining any to adoption. As the ultimate *paterfamilias*, his *potestas* is absolute, and he chooses for adoption purely because it pleases him so to do.⁴⁰

Little wonder, then, that his predestining should be “to the praise of his glorious grace” (v. 6). For whereas the *paterfamilias* of a Roman family would have chosen an heir based on the merits of the adoptee—his ability to bring honour to the *paterfamilias* by his continuing and advancing of the family estate and cult—the Father’s choosing is a choosing in grace. Yes, it is to bring honour to him (cf. to the praise of his glorious grace, v. 6), but the focus of that honour is his grace, not his shrewd selection of super-competent heirs.⁴¹

A final observation as to the ordaining of the Father: his ordaining is unfailingly efficacious. In verse 11, Paul reiterates verse 5 and adds that the Father τὰ πάντα ἐνεργοῦντος κατὰ τὴν βουλήν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ (works all things according to the counsel of his will). Thus, the Father not only purposes the adoption of his elect; he also “works all things” to the accomplishment of that purpose. In other words, the Father himself guarantees that what he ordains in his good pleasure will be so. It is impossible that his purpose not be achieved.⁴² We turn our attention now to the roles of the Son and the Spirit in the accomplishment of adoption, but mark that undergirding all they do is the decree and the working of the Father.

Our first observation in relation to the work of the Son—which holds equally for the work of the Spirit—is that the purposing and working of the Father (so emphasised in

39 The NASB chooses a slight variation in rendering the phrase “according to the kind intention of his will.” This shifts the focus from the pleasure of the Father in his purposing, to his kindness towards those whom his purposing embraces.

40 The sense of the Father’s pleasure in predestining some to adoption is heightened by the words εἰς αὐτόν at the end of the phrase προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν ... εἰς αὐτόν ([God] predestined us for adoption ... to himself). The ESV is technically correct in regarding εἰς αὐτόν as an ellipsis in the context, but it does leave something lacking.

41 Of course, this is no more than a hypothetical alternative, as Eph 2:1–3 makes clear that there are no super-qualified heirs—all mankind are, by nature, children of wrath.

42 See Turretin (1992–1997, 1:320–322) for an excellent discourse on the necessity of the realisation of God’s decrees.

the preceding section) must not be so pressed as to imply that the Son was an unwilling actor in the accomplishment of salvation. Concerning the commonality of purpose within the Trinity, Turretin explains:

As this work is eternal, it is common and undivided to the whole Trinity with this distinction, however—that each person has his own proper and peculiar mode of operation here, agreeable to this saving economy (Turretin 1992–1997, 2:175).

And again:

The pact between the Father and the Son contains the *will* of the Father giving his Son as a ... Redeemer ... and the *will* of the Son offering himself ... to work out that redemption (Turretin 1992–1997, 2:177, emphasis added).

Paul tells us that the Father προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, v. 5). It is through Christ, and no other, that the Father's good pleasure in the adoption of believers is effected. The necessity of Christ's agency in adoption is reinforced in verse 7 as Paul explains that it is in Christ that we have ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ (redemption through his blood).

Recalling the Old Testament background discussed earlier, we note the ease with which Paul shifts from the vocabulary of adoption in verse 5 to that of redemption in verse 7. The defining redemptive event of the Old Testament was the exodus of Israel from Egypt. Though neither the word nor the concept of adoption appears in the exodus event or its later descriptions, it was in relation to the redemption event of the exodus that God first identified Israel as “my son” (Exod 4:22, emphasis added) and that the later prophets spoke of God as “our *Father*, [and our] *Redeemer*” (Isa 63:16, emphasis added). Though adoption per se is absent from the exodus, the paternal-filial relationship between God and Israel, and the redemption accomplished under the cover of the blood of the Passover lamb, certainly foreshadowed the paternal-filial relationship now accomplished in substance through the blood of Christ. Israel was redeemed from the *potestas* (not in legal form, but in substance) of Pharaoh to worship God (cf. Exod 3:12, 18). New Covenant believers are redeemed from the *potestas* of

“the course of this world, ... [and] the prince of the power of the air, ... [and their] flesh” (Eph 2:2–3) to the “praise of [the Father’s] glory” (Eph 1:12). In both cases, redemption is through the blood of the Passover Lamb (cf. Exod 12; 1 Cor 5:7). Paul has taken “in possession” (Bavinck 1960, 178) the paternal-filial buds of the original redemption-by-blood event and brought them to full flower in the language of adoption.

Thus, while we recognise commonality of purpose of Father and Son in the adoption of those predestined to it, we likewise recognise the unique and necessary role of the Son in accomplishing redemption through his blood such that those predestined to it are adopted “through” (v. 5) him. These interwoven metaphors of adoption and redemption find their climax in verses 13–14, in which the role of the Holy Spirit is explicated.

The redemption thread that we have briefly traced includes the idea of possession. Certainly, God himself saw it that way, as he makes clear in his speech to Moses at Mount Sinai following the exodus redemption-by-blood event:

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore ... you shall be my treasured *possession* among all peoples (Exod 19:4–5, emphasis added).

Later reflections on the exodus confirm this redemption-possession relationship. The Psalmist, for example, in an extended recital of the exodus events, affirms that “the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own possession” (Ps 135:4). The LORD himself makes this relationship even more explicit in an Isaianic passage laden with references to the exodus: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine” (Isa 43:1).

What is foreshadowed in God’s redemption-possession of Israel is realised in substance as individual believers, redeemed through Christ’s blood (v. 7), are “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (v. 13)—thereby marking them as God’s own possession.⁴³ The redemption-possession motif reaches its climax in Ephesians 4:30,

⁴³ Arnold (2010, Ch. 2, loc. 2199) explains that a seal was a mark of ownership in the ancient world, and valuable possessions were marked with the personal seal of the owner.

in which Paul explains that believers have been sealed by the Holy Spirit “for the day of redemption.”

Coupled with this, in verse 14, the Holy Spirit is not only a seal but also the ἀρραβὼν (guarantee, or down payment) of the believer’s inheritance. The down payment was the first instalment of a sum due and a guarantee that the balance would follow (Hoehner 2002, 241). Thus, the Holy Spirit’s role in adoption is twofold. It is both to authenticate and mark the redeemed believer as God’s own special possession (per v. 13) and to guarantee to those adopted that they will receive their full inheritance in due course (per v. 14). And what is the inheritance of the adopted? Hoehner (2002, 243) believes it is eternal life in heaven in the presence of God, and Arnold similarly emphasises eternal life in the kingdom of God (2010, Chapter 2: loc. 2214). Surely they are both correct, but Paul’s coupling of verses 13–14 suggests something more: namely, that God himself is the believer’s inheritance. The dovetailing of the redemption and adoption metaphors under the ministry of the Holy Spirit points to this conclusion: the believer is God’s own possession, and God himself is the believer’s inheritance (Mawhinney 1983, 181).⁴⁴

2.5.2 Romans 9:4

Paul’s assertion that “to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, [etc.]” (Rom 9:4) presents us, at face value, with a puzzle. Our earlier review of the practice and understanding of adoption in Old Testament Judaism revealed that it simply did not exist in any meaningful legal or sociocultural sense. Nor did any prophetic expectations attach to the idea of adoption. Quite simply, “the word is not used in the Old Testament or in Judaism” (Moo, 1996, 562). What, then, did Paul mean by “to them belong[s] the adoption” (Rom 9:4)?

44 A detailed treatment of the concept of inheritance is beyond the scope of this study, but it is worth noting briefly that numerous Old Testament themes and prophecies support this interpretation. First, we note the LORD’s promise to the Levites that he himself would be their inheritance (Deut 18:1–2). Second, David speaks of the LORD himself as his “beautiful inheritance” (Ps 16:5–6)—thereby indicating that there is a sense in which God’s promise to the Levites was not strictly exclusive to the historical tribe of Levi, but that the promise pointed to a broader embrace. Indeed, the apostle Peter confirms that all God’s chosen ones are holy priests (1 Pet 2:5, 9). Finally, this interpretation aligns neatly with one of the central promises of the Old Testament—namely, “I will be your God, and you will be my people” (or minor variations thereof in, e.g., Exod 6:7; Ezek 36:28; Jer 7:23; 30:22; 31:33)—and its eschatological fulfilment (Rev 21:3).

We shall propose and defend our solution before drawing from it some implications germane to the purposes of this study.

2.5.2.1 Structure, discourse, and rhetoric

We propose that Paul meant “to them belong[s] the adoption” (Rom 9:4) in the same way one might say regarding the grandchildren of a man who planted a bag of seeds, but did not know at the time that they were apple seeds: “To them belong the apple trees.”

Paul, now able to see that the trees that have grown to maturity are specifically *apple* trees, is able to say that the seeds planted generations ago were specifically *apple* seeds. Transposing from our analogy to redemptive history: Paul, now able to comprehend the realised salvific accomplishment of adoption, is able to recognise that accomplishment in seed form in God’s redemptive-historical dealings with Old Testament Israel and to say, in effect: “Adoption was always theirs; it was theirs from the moment those seeds were planted. Adoption belongs to them; and, if they will receive it, it is still theirs.”

What, then, were the seeds? What was it, in Israel’s redemptive history, that Paul was able to look back on and recognise as adoption-in-seed? We contend it was the sonship motif—especially as manifested in the exodus. Several factors support this conclusion.

First, the relationship between redemption-possession and adoption, which we have already noted in Ephesians 1:13–14 (in mature tree form), is present in seed form in the exodus. In this regard, note especially God’s description of Israel as his son (Exod 4:22; Hos 11:1) and Israel’s description of God as their Father-Redeemer (Isa 63:16).

Second, though the language of *adoption* is absent from the exodus and its later Old Testament reflections, when the language of *choosing* and of *love* is added, the exodus begins to look increasingly like adoption-in-seed:

The LORD your God has *chosen* you to be a people for his treasured *possession*. ... the LORD set his *love* on you and *chose* you. ... it is because the LORD *loves* you ... that the LORD ... *redeemed* you from ... the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deut 7:6–8, emphasis added).

The LORD's choosing, his love, and his redeeming-for-possessing in the exodus are the seeds now full-grown in the LORD's choosing (Eph 1:4), his love (Eph 1:4), and his redeeming-for-possessing (Eph 1:7, 13) in adoption through Christ. But it is not enough to consider only the wide angle perspective of redemptive history; we must also zoom in on the details of Romans 9:4 and ask if this interpretation makes sense of what we see in the immediate context.

We begin by noting the position of some scholars that, whatever adoption meant with respect to Old Testament Israel, it was something different to what it means with respect to the New Testament church. Thus, adoption in Romans 9:4 means something different from adoption in Ephesians 1:5, Galatians 4:5, and Romans 8:15 and 23 (Hodge 1968, 298–299; Murray 1997, 2:4–5; Moo 1996, 562).

In rebuttal we note that the word υιοθεσία is used only by Paul, and only five times, in the New Testament. Furthermore, it does not appear in the LXX and has no religious or salvific connotations beyond those that Paul gives it. Our interpretation of υιοθεσία as a soteriological metaphor can thus be based only on how Paul uses it. Therefore, unless “the context absolutely demands it” (Piper 1993, 32), we should prefer an interpretation of adoption in Romans 9:4 consistent with our interpretation of its other Pauline uses.

Second, the position taken by Hodge, Murray, and Moo appears to rely on understanding Israel in Romans 9:3–5 as *corporate* Israel and the privileges given to them as privileges of the past only. But this is not what Paul says. First, as to whom Paul is speaking of, he uses Ἰσραηλῖται (Israelites, v. 4) rather than Ἰσραὴλ (Israel), which suggests he has individual Israelites in mind more so than theocratic Israel. Furthermore, the antecedent to “they” at the beginning of v. 4 is “[those cut off from Christ] ... my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (v. 3). It is present-day Israelites, not the nation of Israel, whose rejection of Christ causes Paul “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” (v. 2) as a present experience. This is confirmed by the tense of the verb in the phrase οἵτινές εἰσιν Ἰσραηλῖται at the beginning of v. 4: “They *are* (not ‘were’) Israelites.” Likewise, as to the privileges, he speaks of them also in the present tense. The three dependant clauses that follow “they are Israelites” are all introduced by the relative pronoun ὧν (to them belong, v. 4–5, from their race, v. 5) and do not contain any verbs. In such instances the tenses of the subordinate clauses must be

decided by the tense of the main verb of the principal clause—in this case “are” (v. 4). In other words, the privileges listed—of which adoption is the first—are listed as *present* privileges (Piper 1993, 23–24; Schreiner 2018, 475).

It is to present Israelites that Paul affirms the ongoing reality of the privileges that have always been theirs. This does not mean that every individual Israelite of the past was saved, nor that every individual Israelite present or future will be saved. Rather, it means that ethno-historical Israel was the beneficiary of tremendous privileges in the working out of God’s redemptive-historical purposes as they foreshadowed the salvation he would accomplish through the Messiah yet to come. Now that the substance of what was foreshadowed has come (cf. Col 2:17), salvation (i.e., adoption, v. 4) remains available to all who will receive it by faith.

Those who will now receive it by faith prove themselves true spiritual children of Abraham (cf. Rom 9:7)—true spiritual Israelites. This distinction always existed: there always was a difference between *ethno-historical* Israel and *spiritual* Israel (Rom 9:6b)—the former were biological descendants of Abraham, whereas the latter share the faith of Abraham (cf. Rom 11:7; Gal 3:7).

Adoption as sons of God is available to Jews as much as to Gentiles, for both receive it by faith (cf. Rom 10:12–13).⁴⁵ But the fact that Gentiles are now also beneficiaries of the promises outworked through God’s dealings with *ethno-historical* Israel does not mean that individual Israelites are no longer able to benefit from those same promises (cf. Rom 11:1–7). Thus, Paul says in v. 4: “They are Israelites, and to them belong[s] ... adoption.”

This is most significant for the purposes of this study. The fact that Paul was able to look at the full-grown apple tree of adoption and say, in effect, “I see where in redemptive history those seeds were planted; that tree grew out of the Father–son relationship between God and Israel that began at the exodus,” means that adoption is located within the larger theological category of sonship. Obvious though that may sound, its significance should not be missed.

⁴⁵ This too was foreshadowed in the Old Testament. See, for example, Gen 12:3; Isa 44:6, 45:22, 49:6, 52:10, 56:6–7, 60:3; Gal 3:8; as well as the inclusion of four Gentile women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah’s widow) in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:1–16).

Sonship is among the dominant themes of the Bible (cf. Ferguson 1989, 6; Carson, cited in Burke 2011, 22). C. S. Lewis judged that the notion of the sonship of believers “brings us up against the very centre of Theology” (2002:129). Burke (2011, 23) notes that the metaphor of sonship is typological and follows an Adam–Israel–David–Christ–[Christians-in-Christ] trajectory. Bound up together with sonship are the ideas of image and likeness. Adam is called “the son of God” (Luke 3:38) and was created in God’s image and likeness (Gen 1:26–27). In due course, Adam fathered Seth, a son “in his own likeness, after his image” (Gen 5:3). From this pattern we see that sonship and image, though distinct, are inextricably interwoven. We cannot explain sonship biblically apart from the concepts of image and likeness.

Following Adam’s sin, though, his sonship was lost and the image of God in mankind was spoiled. We shall come to Romans 8 in due course but note here briefly that restoration of sonship (Rom 8:14) and of the image of God [the Son] (Rom 8:29) are intrinsic to our salvation through Christ—the perfect Son (Matt 3:17) and true image of the Father (Col 1:15).

We shall content ourselves with these preliminary comments for now as, already, we have wandered somewhat from Romans 9:4 itself. What is important for our purposes at this juncture is to recognise that by locating adoption within the arc of sonship (bound up as sonship is with the story of the image of God created and spoiled, and renewed in Christ) as far back as the exodus we have begun to make the case for a soteriology in which the renewal of the image and likeness of God in man is inherent (cf. Col 3:10). Moreover, we have recognised that this was always God’s agenda; spiritual formation is not a latecomer to God’s salvific purposes.⁴⁶

2.5.2.2 Trinitarian purposes and actions

Actions and/or purposes unique to the persons of God the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit in relation to the adoption of believers are more suggested than they are described in and around Romans 9:4—and only briefly so.

⁴⁶ Of course, these matters are addressed much more explicitly in the New Testament than in the Old, but that is a difference of degree rather than of type.

We note first, with respect to the privileges listed in verses 4–5, that they consist of three thematically related pairs (Moo 1996, 561–562; Piper 1993, 21; Schreiner 2018, 473), as follows:

Figure 2.4

Privileges belonging to Israel in Romans 9:4–5

		Theme
ἡ υἰοθεσία, the adoption	ἡ νομοθεσία, the giving of the law	The exodus
ἡ δόξα, the glory	ἡ λατρεία, the worship	The tabernacle/temple cult
αἱ διαθήκαι, the covenants	αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι, the promises	The saving promises of God

As we know that it was specifically as Father-Redeemer that God described himself in relation to the exodus (Isa 63:16), this structure suggests that it is specifically God the Father who is the initiator of adoption.

The first pair in Figure 2.4, above, also helps us discern the role of the Son. As the giving of the law followed the redemption-by-blood event of the exodus, so too the accomplishment of adoption required the sacrifice of the true Passover Lamb, namely, Christ the Son.

With respect to the Son, we may also infer from the relationship between verse 3 and verses 4–5 that it is only in being joined to Christ (i.e., the opposite of “cut off from Christ,” v. 3) that these privileges reach their true fulfilment.

Paul does not develop the Holy Spirit’s role in this passage, but does in others to which we shall come in due course.

2.5.3 Galatians 4:5

Within the protological-eschatological framework noted earlier, Galatians 4:5 most explicitly identifies adoptive sonship as the soteriological accomplishment of the Son:

“[God sent forth his Son] ... to redeem ... so that we might receive adoption as sons.” Its contribution, however, should not be reduced to this point alone.

2.5.3.1 Structure, discourse, and rhetoric

We begin by noting that Galatians 4:5 is situated within the immediate context of Galatians 3:15–4:7, which itself must be understood in light of what has preceded. We shall present our understanding of the immediate structure after a brief overview of the larger argument.

Following a brief greeting (1:1–5), Paul charges the Galatian believers with deserting Christ and turning to “a different gospel” (1:6)—though he is quick to clarify that there is only one true gospel, and any “different” gospel is no gospel at all (1:7–9). Paul proceeds to explain that the gospel he preached to them was no man-made concoction—indeed, he received it directly by revelation from the risen Lord Jesus (1:10–12). The remainder of Chapters 1 and 2 consists largely of a defence, on the foundation of this direct revelation from Christ, of Paul’s apostolic authenticity and, by extension, the authority of his message (1:13–2:14). Towards the end of Chapter 2, Paul begins to address the issue that occasioned his writing of the letter, namely a controversy over whether one is justified by the keeping of the Old Testament law or by faith in Christ alone (2:15–21). Paul could hardly be more emphatic in affirming that justification is possible only through faith in Christ: “If righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose” (2:21). Having laid this foundation of the uniqueness (1:6–9), authority (1:10–2:14), and necessity (2:15–21) of the gospel he preached, Paul proceeds in 3:1–4:7 to defend the content of that gospel in three arguments: one each from experience (3:1–5), example (3:6–14), and redemptive history (3:15–4:7).

The main burden of Paul’s argument is to remind the Galatian believers that they had already become sons of God (3:26; 4:5, 6, 7) by faith in Christ, and to rebuke and correct any thinking that would return them to captivity under the law (3:23; 4:1–3). The high privilege of sonship was already theirs, evidenced by their reception of the Spirit (3:2; 4:6). Moreover, this status of sonship was given to them in fulfilment of a promise made by God to Abraham—they did not have to earn it (3:18, 29). We might (very loosely) paraphrase Paul’s exhortation thus: “You are already sons (proof 1, proof 2,

etc.)! Why on earth are you trying to return to a lesser relational status?” Our task now is to understand the function and contribution of the metaphor of adoption within this argument.

To that end, we note the preponderance of language that locates the whole argument within the framework of a Father–son relationship. Paul speaks of κληρονομία (inheritance in 3:18), κληρονόμος (heir(s) in 3:29; 4:1, 7), υἱός (son(s) in 3:26; 4:6, 7), υιοθεσία (adoption as sons in 4:5), and ἀββὰ πατήρ (Abba Father in 4:6). We shall examine these in turn but note first that, arguably, διαθήκη (covenant in 3:15, 17) might also belong in that same framework. Louw and Nida define διαθήκη (covenant) as an agreement between two parties specifying reciprocal benefits and responsibilities; in other words, a contract (L&N, §LN34.43). The referent covenant in this case, however, is that between God and Abraham made in Genesis 15:18 (cf. Gal 3:16) and frequently thereafter referred to by God as “my covenant” (e.g., Gen 17:2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 21). When the LXX translators sought a Greek equivalent for the underlying Hebrew בְּרִית (covenant), they chose διαθήκη (covenant), which, strictly, carries the literal sense of a final will or testament, so as to emphasise that the covenant relationship rested on the initiative of one party alone (i.e., God), rather than on the outcome of negotiations between parties of equal standing (for which συνθήκη—with the prefix συν rather than δια—would have been more fitting). Behm explains that the original Hebrew word “goes beyond the idea of a contract and conveys the idea of a binding expression of the divine will” (Behm 1985, 160). BDAG claims that, by Hellenistic times, διαθήκη (covenant) referred “exclusively” to a last/testamentary will (BDAG, 228).

Yet whether Paul intended to invoke the idea of a human testamentary will in verse 15 must ultimately be decided not by historical usage of the word but rather by the way he uses it in this particular instance. Commentators, offering arguments in favour of the more general “covenant” and the more specific “will/testament,” disagree, Moo (2013, 226–228) preferring “testament” and Schreiner (2010, 226–227) “covenant,” for example. Their arguments notwithstanding, certainty is both elusive and unnecessary in this instance. What is necessary is to recognise that, as God’s covenant with Abraham was “a binding expression of the divine will” (Behm 1985, 160), it was

therefore unchangeable.⁴⁷ This critical point undergirds what Paul goes on to say, namely that the covenant made with Abraham was not annulled, superseded, or in any sense supplanted by the subsequent introduction of the law (cf. Gal 3:17). While we must be content, therefore, to say no more than that Paul *might* have intended testamentary overtones in Galatians 3:15 (which, if he did, would further scaffold the Father–son framework of his argument), we need have no such hesitation regarding other key terms in his argument.

Paul's use of the word κληρονομία (inheritance in v. 18), for example—which, in its ordinary usage in the ancient world, as in the modern, referred to property received from a parent or ancestor—firmly locates his argument within the framework of a Father–son relationship.⁴⁸ What, then, is the inheritance the Galatians, as sons, have received from God as their Father through Christ? Israel's corporate inheritance was the promised land and, as the land belonged to God (cf. Deut 10:14), when the Old Testament speaks of Israel *inheriting* the land (e.g., Exod 23:30; 32:13; Num 34:13; Deut 1:38; 3:28), it connotes their *taking possession* of it, rather than a transfer of legal title (*NIDNTTE*, 2:694). But Israel's taking possession of the promised land was always, in one sense, a foreshadowing of a greater inheritance. Just what that greater inheritance is, Paul makes explicit in Galatians 3:14, 18, and 29: Salvation in Christ Jesus, as evidenced by receiving the Spirit.

The covenant (potentially with testamentary overtones) together with the notions of heirship and inheritance have served to locate Paul's argument within a familial framework. Bearing in mind both the sonship motif of the Old Testament and the patriarchal nature of Roman family and estate law, these notions imply more than a *generally* familial dimension to salvation—they denote *specifically* a *Father–son* relationship. Moreover, not only does the existence of this relationship suffuse the argument, but the logical structure of the argument reveals that the zenith of Pauline soteriology is found in the reality of sonship given and received. What was promised to Abraham, Paul argues (Gal 3:18–25), has now been realised, namely that “in Christ

47 Turretin (1992–1997, 1:204) explains that the immutability of God denies him “not only all change, but also all possibility of change ... with respect to ... [his] will.”

48 Refer to our earlier discussion on Eph 1:14.

Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (v. 26), and again, “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are ... a son” (4:6–7).

Sonship—the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham—is what the “fullness of time” (Gal 4:4) awaited; what the incarnation (born of woman, Gal 4:4) heralded; what the active obedience of Christ (born under the law, Gal 4:4) earned; what his death on the cross (to redeem, Gal 4:5) secured; what the indwelling Spirit (God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, Gal 4:6) vivifies; such that we now know God as “Abba! Father!” (Gal 4:6). It is in terms of adoption (Gal 4:6) that this salvific Mount Everest is finally scaled.

The Spirit-cry of Galatians 4:6 deserves our attention. At first glance we may wonder at Paul’s apparent repetition, ἄββᾶ being nothing more than a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic אבא, meaning, simply, “father” (BDAG, 1). Thus, literally, the Spirit teaches us to cry “Father! Father!” Yet Louw and Nida (L&N, §LN12.12) explain that it is a vocative form—a form of direct address *to* God as Father, rather than a form used to speak *about* God as Father. Thus, in Aramaic, it is the form of address used in prayer to God as Father (BDAG, 1), thereby expressing “childlike intimacy and trust” (Kittel 1985, 2).

Some have made too much of this, claiming that it derives from ‘baby-speak’ (similar to the English ‘da-da’), but the evidence for this is not persuasive (cf. VanGemeren 1998). What is clearly attested is the use of the word as the standard term by which Jewish sons and daughters—from youth to adulthood—would address their own fathers. Thus, though the childish ‘daddy’ goes too far, *abba* certainly does denote a very particular relationship, namely that of a child to his or her natural father. It is no surprise, therefore, that there is not a single known occurrence in the entire corpus of ancient Jewish devotional literature of the word being used in address to God; Jews would have been unable to bring themselves to address in such familial language the God whose name, Yahweh, they treasured as sacred. Most significant for our purposes is that fact that the Aramaic אבא (father) “undoubtedly ... underlies, either directly or indirectly, the various Greek renderings” by which Jesus addresses God as his Father

in the gospel accounts (*NIDNTTE*, 1:85–86).⁴⁹ This is significant: the indwelling “Spirit of [the] Son” (Gal 4:6) now draws us to address God by the very word, *abba*, that had hitherto been the exclusive prerogative of *The Son*. Certainly we want to be careful to preserve the distinction between Christ (who is the Son by *nature*) and ourselves (as sons by *grace* through adoption); yet at the same time we must not shrink back from this truth for fear that Paul has taken us too far: Our status as sons, and our access to *the Father* as *our abba* is, in Christ, no lesser a status nor restricted an access than are the privileges of Christ himself.⁵⁰

Thus adoption functions within the rhetoric of this passage as the pre-eminent soteriological accomplishment that serves: with respect to God, as that which consummates his promise to Abraham; with respect to Christ, as both the goal and the triumph of his incarnation; and with respect to believers, as that which both legitimises their status as heirs and realises their experience of the inheritance so gained, namely a relationship, by the Spirit, with God as Father.

2.5.3.2 Trinitarian purposes and actions

We proceed now to describe any actions and/or purposes unique to the persons of God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in relation to the accomplishment of adoptive sonship.

Beginning with the Father, we note first that it was the Father who made the original promise (cf. Gal 3:18) to Abraham. Thus, it is the Father’s will that, at bottom, is the foundation of our adoption. The broader context makes this explicit in that it was “*according to the will of our God and Father*” (Gal 1:4, emphasis added) that Christ gave himself to secure our salvation, which in Galatians 3:15–4:7 is then explicated in terms of adoptive sonship.

Furthermore, it was the Father who appointed a guardian (i.e., the law, Gal 3:17–25) to prepare Israel for the fulfilment of that promise. This is not explicitly attributed to the Father but is implied insofar as Paul’s corresponding analogy states that the interim

49 With the exception of Jesus’s cry from the cross (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34), which is a quote from Psalm 22:1.

50 Indeed, the Father has given to us status and privilege that angels would not dare claim (cf. Heb 1:5; 12:5–8).

guardianship endured “until the date set by [the] *father*” (Gal 4:2, emphasis added). Further, it was the Father who in the fullness of time “sent forth his Son” (Gal 4:4) with the explicit purpose that “we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:6), and who likewise “sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” (Gal 4:6) to the end that we would be taught to relate to him as “Abba! Father!” (Gal 4:6).

Thus we see that, though the explicit vocabulary of predestination, election, and choosing is lacking in this passage (as compared to Eph 1), the same realities certainly are present. Conversely, an aspect of the Father’s work that is only alluded to in the Ephesians passage is made explicit here in Galatians, namely the Father’s providence in salvation. Whereas in Ephesians 1:11 Paul says that believers have “obtained an inheritance ... according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,” in Galatians Paul expounds the Father’s ἐνεργέω (work[ing] in Eph 1:11) in terms of the appointment of a guardian (Gal 3:19, 24; 4:2) and the sending of the Son and the Spirit (Gal 4:4–6). Note further that redemption (Gal 4:5) was not the ultimate end, but was ἵνα (so that, Gal 4:5) sonship by adoption could be realised. Thus the Father is sovereign over the adoption of his elect, not only in predestination, election, and choosing, but also in the workings of providence to the achievement of his desires.

Turning our attention to the Son, we note first that it was in him that the promise to Abraham was fulfilled (Gal 3:16, 26, 29). It was only at the Son’s coming, in the “fullness of time” (Gal 4:4), that sonship—so long foreshadowed in the Old Testament—could be realised.⁵¹ Second, we note that all that belongs to the coming and the ministry of the Son (Gal 4:4–5) was to the end (ἵνα, Gal 4:5) that “we might receive adoption as sons.” Thus, his incarnation, and all that was therein entailed, his life of perfect obedience under the law, his sacrifice of himself on the cross to redeem us from the bondage of the law—all were to the accomplishment of the Father’s will in adoption. Thus, while Paul ascribes all the initiative in predestination, election, and providence to the Father, he is likewise clear that the Father gives salvific effect to his will only through the Son; hence, “*in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God*” (Gal 3:26,

51 Note that this temporal contingency is also alluded to (though less explicitly) in Eph 1:10.

emphasis added). In Galatians, as in Ephesians, salvation—adoption as sons—is purposed by the Father and accomplished through the Son.

If this passage in Galatians has less by quantity to say concerning the role of the Spirit in adoption, it certainly has no less by significance. Two issues arising from verse 6 warrant reflection.

First, at face value Paul appears to be specifying a temporal or logical sequence to the accomplishment of sonship and the reception of the Spirit. “Because you are sons,” Paul says, “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” (Gal 4:6). Wallace affirms that ὅτι (because, Gal 4:6) should be read as causal in this instance (Wallace 1996, 461), but that appears to create an inconsistency with Paul’s argument in Romans 8:14–17, in which the reverse sequence is implied. We do not believe, however, that Paul intended to indicate sequence at all. To claim that those who were formerly enslaved under sin and the law could enjoy the experience of sonship (i.e., the indwelling Spirit of the Son) prior to having had conferred upon them the status of sonship (i.e., you are sons) is a theological non-starter. Yet the opposite—status without corresponding experience—likewise does not hold. Indeed, Paul has just argued that it is “through faith” that we are “sons of God” (Gal 3:26); as faith is inseparable from the Spirit (cf. Gal 3:5; Rom 8:9–11), it follows that saving faith is given by the “Spirit of the Son” and that, therefore, there can be no sequence—temporal or logical—to the reception of the status of sonship and the experience of sonship. Rather, Paul’s point is that the Spirit confirms—by way of real inward experience—to believers that their status of sonship is true. In other words, what God knows to be objectively true (i.e., that this person is now his adopted son) he wants us also to know to be true and has provided for our knowing this by the ministry of the indwelling Spirit of the Son.

Second, what does it mean that the indwelling Spirit cries to the Father? A thorough answer to this question would demand more space than our purposes allow, but we may nevertheless scratch the surface of it. The first point to note is that the Spirit is sent into our καρδιά (hearts, Gal 4:6). As Paul’s whole argument in this section of Galatians is expounded within a covenantal framework, our minds should immediately go to key texts in which the relationship between the heart and covenant features, most notably Ezekiel 36:26–27 and Jeremiah 31:31–34. In both of these programmatic

prophetic passages, God promises a time when he, under the auspices of a new covenant, will do a work in the hearts of his people such as will cause them to walk in accordance with his ways. In Ezekiel this from-the-heart obedience directly follows God's promise, "I will put my Spirit within you" (Ezek 36:27). In Jeremiah the promise is, "I will write [my law] on their hearts" (Jer 31:33). In Galatians Paul points to the fulfilment of this prophecy: "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Gal 4:6). The broader context is critical: Paul's principal burden is that the Galatian believers, having been justified by faith, now continue in sanctification by faith. Or, in different vocabulary, having received the Spirit, they should now continue by the Spirit (cf. Gal 3:3; 4:9; 5:4, 16–18). With both the Galatian context and the prophetic/covenantal background in mind, we understand Paul's point, which we loosely paraphrase as follows: "You have received the long-promised Spirit, and that Spirit is the very Spirit of the Son, who loves to obey his Father and walk in his ways. Therefore, live by the Spirit—not by the law. In fact, that very Spirit of the Son cries out to the Father from within your own heart to help you walk in his ways." This last point is critical. Moo reduces the crying out of the Spirit to merely a "deep and emotional reaction within the believer's heart to the joyful conviction, brought by the Spirit, that we are, indeed, God's sons" (Moo 2013, 270). Burke (2006, 90), Ryken (2005, 165–167), and Schreiner (2010, 272) concur. No doubt this emphasis is right and true; but does it tell the whole story? Do the logic and the context of Paul's argument not require that we understand this from-the-heart cry of the Spirit of the Son as the cry to be sustained in obedience as sons to the will of a Father whom we know loves us as sons? If this interpretation is right, then it furthers the principal goal of our study, namely the expounding of a soteriology in which transformation in Christlikeness is inherent.

In summary, then, Galatians 4:5 teaches us: with respect to the Father, that he is sovereign over the workings of providence to the achievement of his will in adoption; with respect to the Son, that the Father gives salvific effect to his will only through the Son; and with respect to the Spirit, that he applies the Father's desire and the Son's accomplishment to our hearts such that we both know, experientially, the reality of our sonship and that we desire to live lives of obedience to our Father, in the likeness of the Son, by the power of the Spirit.

Such a thoroughgoing unity of purpose between the persons of the Trinity, then, gives rise to Paul's concluding statement in this section: "You are ... a son, and if a son, then an heir through God" (Gal 4:7). Human response has been necessary (You are sons ... through faith, Gal 3:26), but so comprehensive and effective has been the working of the Trinity that it is eminently fitting that Paul emphasises the ultimate agency of God in concluding that those in Christ are κληρονόμος (heir(s), Gal 3:29; 4:7) διὰ (through) God, where the preposition διὰ identifies God as the ultimate author of this salvation.⁵²

2.5.4 Romans 8:15

Within the arc of salvation conceived to salvation consummated, we have seen that the metaphor of adoption embraces the Father's predestining of his elect to sonship "before the foundation of the world" in Ephesians 1:4, the foreshadowing of adoptive sonship in the covenantal sonship of Israel in Romans 9:4, and the realisation of the status of adoptive sonship via the redemption accomplished by Christ on the cross in Galatians 4:5. But that status—"sons of God, through faith" (Gal 3:26)—now objectively realised in Christ, must be lived in the everyday experience of the adopted. This is Paul's burden in the argument in which adoption features in 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 as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father'"—to which we now turn.

2.5.4.1 Structure, discourse, and rhetoric

There exists no shortage of proposals as to the literary structure of Paul's letter to the Romans (cf. Bruce 1985, 73–75; Longenecker 2016, loc. 30–82; Moo 1996, 32–35; Morris 1988, 33–34; Mounce 1995, 21; Schreiner 2018, 30–32). Even so, though commentators differ on the specifics of where each movement begins and ends, there is broad consensus as to the major movements of the argument.⁵³ One matter on which there is unanimity is that the end of Chapter 8 concludes one major section and

52 The preposition διὰ usually indicates intermediate agency, but Wallace (1996, 432–434) shows that it sometimes denotes ultimate agency or cause. Considering the context, that is "undoubtedly" the meaning intended here (Moo 2013, 271). Hence, various English Bibles render the end of v. 7 "God has made you his/an heir" (e.g., NLT, NIV, CSB).

53 The most important (but not only) differences have to do with whether Ch. 5 belongs as part of Chs. 1–4 or 6–8. In other words: Is the first major movement Chs. 1–4 or 1–5? And is the second Chs. 5–8 or 6–8? Bruce (1985) and Morris (1988) are examples of those who take Ch. 5 as belonging with what preceded it, and Longenecker (2016), Moo (1996), and Schreiner (2018) are representative of those who view Ch. 5 as the beginning of the next major movement.

Chapter 9 begins another. Thus, for our purposes, a bird's eye view of Chapters 1 to 8 will suffice.

Paul begins with a greeting and thanksgiving (1:1–15) before announcing the theme of his letter: the gospel that simultaneously displays the righteousness of God and makes sinners righteous, by faith, before him (1:16–17). The first major movement of the argument (1:18–4:25) exposes the universal reign of sin (proving in 1:18–3:20 that all people—Jew and Gentile alike—are accountable for their sin and therefore guilty before God). Next, Paul explicates (3:21–4:25) the only solution to mankind's dire predicament. It is a solution that only God could provide and that, thus provided, reveals his own righteousness—namely that God imputes our sin to his Son, Jesus Christ, and his perfect righteousness to us such that we are, by faith, counted righteous in his sight. Thus concludes the first major movement. The next, from 5:1–8:39, unpacks the assurance, or hope, that the justified believer now enjoys because of the solution God has provided. That assurance is rooted in Christ (5:1–11), whose death and resurrection inaugurated the reign of grace and life such that all who are in him may be certain of eternal life (5:12–21). The reign of grace triumphs over the power of sin (6:1–23) and the law (7:1–25) such that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1). Those in Christ now live, not by trying to please God by the impotent efforts of the flesh, but instead by the power of the Spirit (8:2–11). In fact, they are no less than sons of God—having received the Spirit of adoption as sons—and are thus empowered to obedience even as they suffer in this world (8:12–17). But this world is not the end of the story; indeed, those in Christ await a new creation that, when they enter it, will make all their present sufferings seem as nothing (8:18–25). From now until then, the Spirit aids them (8:26–27) and they have the assurance that God will certainly bring them into that glory (8:28–30). Paul then concludes the movement with a celebration of the security of those in Christ (8:31–39).

Within the broad sweep of the above, Paul's main point in Romans 8:1–17 is not difficult to discern: Those in Christ are in the Spirit and are empowered to filial obedience by the same indwelling Spirit. Clear as the thrust of Paul's argument is, however, our task is to determine the function of the metaphor of adoption within it and, to that end, several details deserve our attention.

Key to our understanding of Paul's use of adoption in this pericope is to note that, syntactically, the noun stands in a genitival relationship to another; Paul speaks not of υιοθεσία (adoption), but of πνεῦμα υιοθεσία (the Spirit of adoption as sons, Rom 8:15). Thus, we must seek to understand Paul's employment of the metaphor in this context, not as an independent phenomenon, but as part of the construction "the Spirit of adoption."

The first question we must answer is that of the nature of the genitival relationship between πνεῦμα (spirit) and υιοθεσία (adoption), and on this matter respected lexicographers and commentators are not unanimous. BDAG says "the Spirit is more closely defined by a genitive of thing" (BDAG, 835). Louw and Nida render the phrase as "the Spirit of sonship" and give the meaning as "the Spirit who makes us sons of God" or "the Spirit that causes us to become God's sons" (L&N, §LN12.18)—which, though they do not specify, sounds like a genitive of product (cf. Wallace 1996, 106–107). According to *NIDNTTE*, "the gift of the Spirit is what makes the individual a ... sharer in [Christ's] sonship" (*NIDNTTE*, 3:815)—which, though again not specified, sounds like a genitive of means (cf. Wallace 1996, 125). Another proposal is that Paul has in mind "the Spirit who anticipates adoption" (Barrett's 1957 *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 163, cited in Burke 1998, 316), but this seems, without warrant, to fill Romans 8:15 with meaning drawn from Romans 8:23 and does not sufficiently recognise the present reality of adoption. Hodge says, "the Spirit is so called because *he* adopts" (Hodge 1968, 266, emphasis added), but, while not denying the Holy Spirit a role in adoption, we must affirm, contra Hodge, the Father's eminence in adoption. Murray argues that the Spirit "creates in the children of God the filial disposition and confidence by which they are able to cry, 'Abba! Father!' and exercise the rights and privileges of God's children" (Murray 1997, 1:296). Moo says the Spirit of adoption is "the agent through whom the believer's sonship is both bestowed and confirmed" (Moo 1996, 502). Schreiner (2018) follows Burke (1998) in understanding υιοθεσία as a genitive of quality expressing the reality that "for Paul adoption and the Spirit are so closely connected they ought not to be separated; they are unitedly and reciprocally related" (Burke 1998, 317). I am persuaded that the main idea is not that the Spirit bestows, anticipates, or expresses adoption (though the last of these comes close) but rather that "the Spirit and adoption belong together as gifts of the end time so that the

Spirit and adoption are intertwined” (Schreiner 2018, 417). Thus, I concur with Burke’s (1998, 317) understanding that the genitive in this case is one of quality.

To appreciate Paul’s main point, we must now take a step back and note the broader context. Beginning in Chapter 5 and concluding at the end of Chapter 8, Paul constructs a creation-to-consummation theological framework. Within this framework we note two key redemptive-historical developments. First, the era of the law has given way, in Christ, to the “new way of the Spirit” (Rom 7:6). Second, Adam, “who was a type of the one who was to come” (Rom 5:14), anticipated “a filial state of glory beyond his provisional Edenic context” (Garner 2016, 14). Later, Christ—the “one who was to come”—did indeed come, and secured for all God’s elect the sonship so anticipated. Thus, Christ inaugurates the era of the Spirit and of realised sonship, for they are one and the same thing.

Within the creation-to-consummation construction of Romans 5–8, there are two occurrences of the noun υιοθεσία: the first in the context of the already-realised but not yet fully-consummated present experience of sonship (Rom 8:15); and the second in the context of the ultimate consummation of sonship in the new creation (Rom 8:23). It is the former that occupies us for the moment, and the first thing that strikes us about the immediate context is the ubiquity of the Spirit, who is mentioned 17 times in Romans 8:1–17 (by contrast, only once in the whole of Ch. 7). The metaphor of adoption occurs in a heavily Spirit-laden context. Thus, Schweizer is right in saying “to come to Christ is to come into the sphere of the Spirit” (Schweizer 1985a, 889).

Next, we note Paul’s statement that, as believers are “in the Spirit [and not in the flesh]” (Rom 8:9), they are ὀφειλέτης (debtors) “not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh” (Rom 8:12). BDAG explains that a *debtor* is one who is “under obligation in a moral or social sense” (BDAG, 742). Believers, Paul argues, are under no moral or relational obligation to the desires of the flesh. Interestingly, the positive counterpoint to this exhortation⁵⁴ is absent; Paul does not go on to say, “But they are debtors to the Spirit.” Some (e.g., Hodge 1968, 264; Murray 1997, 1:293) believe the counterpoint is implied; but we wonder, then, why Paul did not simply say so? Gieniusz argues that Paul

54 Strictly speaking Paul’s statement is an indicative (cf. ἐσμέν, “we are” in Rom 8:12), but the exhortation is certainly implied.

intentionally omits the counterpoint so as to emphasize the “total character of the filial relationship of Christians to God, as opposed to their past dependences” (Gieniusz 2013, 61). In other words, it is not indebtedness, but relationship, that motivates believers. The believer’s primary relationship is no longer to the flesh, but instead to God in the Spirit. We believe this accords with Paul’s earlier statement that those “in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8) and with the corresponding implication that it is only those in the Spirit that can please God, as he is pleased, not by the effort to repay his grace, but rather by the willing obedience of his children (cf. Ps 116:12–14; Acts 17:25; 1 Sam 15:22).

Continuing our analysis of the context in which Paul employs his *υιοθεσία* metaphor, we note the enmity between *σάρξ* (flesh in Rom 8:3–9, 12–13) and *πνεῦμα* (Spirit in Rom 8:2, 4–6, 9–11, 13–14) that suffuses the argument of Romans 8:2–14. At its most basic level, *σάρξ* denotes the literal, bodily flesh of a human (or animal) body, or the whole body as a physical entity (BDAG, 914–915). Paul does occasionally use *σάρξ* in this way (e.g., 2 Cor 12:7), but in this passage in Romans it refers to the human body not as a physical organism, but rather as the instrument of sin. BDAG explains that “in Paul’s thought especially, all parts of the body constitute a totality known as ... flesh, which is dominated by sin to such a degree that wherever flesh is, all forms of sin are likewise present, and no good thing can live in [it]” (BDAG, 915). The *σάρξ* in Romans 8, then, is bound up with the sinful nature of man; not that the physical body is in itself evil (i.e., Paul is not advocating dualism), but rather that insofar as the sin-dominated *σάρξ* dictates the desires and behaviours of those who “set [their minds] on the flesh” (Rom 8:6), so “it becomes a power that opposes the working of the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:17)” (Schweizer 1985b, 1005). The counterparty to *σάρξ* in the argument of Romans 8 is the *πνεῦμα* (which, in context, clearly denotes the Holy Spirit). Believers are not to live “according to the *σάρξ*” (Rom 8:12, 13) but instead must be “led by the Spirit of God” (Rom 8:14). While Paul’s argument in Galatians was that the reception of the Spirit marked believers as belonging to Christ (Gal 3:2–3) and as beneficiaries of the promise to Abraham (Gal 3:14), his burden in Romans 8:12–17 is to emphasise both the “immediacy of personal relationship with God” (*NIDNTTE*, 3:815) through adoption, and the fact that the presence of the Spirit in the life of the believer is “discernible by its [effect]” (*NIDNTTE*, 3:815), namely, willing filial obedience.

As to the former (i.e., the immediate experience of a personal relationship with God), Paul follows his explanation of the Spirit-formed cry, “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15), with the reassurance that this experience evidences the reality that believers are indeed “children of God ... heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:16–17). It is the Spirit—specifically the Spirit of *adoption*—who enables this cry and “himself bears witness” (Rom 8:16) to the believers’ new status as children of God. Schreiner says that this witness is given to believers at the moment of conversion (Schreiner 2018, 420). Schreiner is correct, provided he does not mean to imply that this witness is limited to an experience at the moment of conversion—as the present active indicative *συμμαρτυρέω* (bears witness with/to in Rom 8:16) makes clear, this is an ongoing activity of the Spirit for the ongoing benefit of the believer.

A matter of debate is whether the Holy Spirit bears witness “with,” or “to,” our spirit (Rom 8:16). Is a joint, or a single, witness envisaged by the text? Paul says that the Holy Spirit *συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν* (bears witness with/to our spirit, in Rom 8:16). The question is whether *τῷ πνεύματι* is a dative of association (which would yield “with our spirit”) or a dative indirect object (in which case “to our spirit” would be correct). Schreiner (2018, 419–420), Fee (1994, 568), Gundersen (2011), and (probably) Moo (1996, 504) are representative of those who favour the associative interpretation, namely that the Holy Spirit and the spirit of the believer bear joint witness to the reality of our sonship. The main pillars of argument in favour of this interpretation are that Old Testament law (cf. Deut 19:15) required at least two witnesses to establish a matter and that Paul uses *συμμαρτυρούσης* for joint-witnesses in Romans 2:15 and 9:1. Against this it may be argued that the plurality of witnesses required in criminal proceedings is a necessary accommodation to human limitation and sinfulness; there is no reason why, in principle, God’s testimony alone would not be sufficient to establish any matter. Indeed, to suggest otherwise flies in the face of God’s own claim to be able to do just that (cf. Ps 50:7; Acts 13:22; 15:8; Heb 10:15; 1 John 5:9–10). Furthermore, even if, for the sake of argument, the need for a second witness is granted, it is difficult to see how the believer could be a witness in a matter concerning his own status in relationship to God. How can the adoptee be, in a legal sense, a suitable witness to the legitimacy of his own adoption? A fundamental tenet of jurisprudence is that witnesses to a matter should not have great investment in the outcome thereof.

Though the argument from legal proceedings is not compelling, the lexical argument—at least at face value—is more so. The prefix *sun-* (with) in the compound verb *συμμαρτυρεῖ* (to testify with, Rom 8:16) certainly does appear to favour the associative interpretation of the dative following. Furthermore, the verb appears in only two other places in the New Testament—in Romans 2:15 and 9:1—and both, according to Strathmann, indicate joint witness (Strathmann 1985, 569–570). These factors have led some (e.g., Fee 1994, 562; Ferguson 1996, 185; Schreiner 2018, 419–420) to prefer the joint-witness view of the Holy Spirit’s activity in Romans 8:16. On the other hand, Wallace cautions that “not every dative following a *sun-* prefixed verb is a dative of association” (Wallace 1996, 159) and goes on to discuss Romans 8:16 as a “debatable example.” Key to Wallace’s argument is that a number of *sun-* prefixed compound verbs lost their associative force as Koine Greek evolved, sometimes becoming synonymous with the simple verb, and sometimes intensifying it. BDAG concurs, stating that, by the sixth or seventh century BC, “the prefix *sun-* has in the highest degree the effect of strengthening” (BDAG, 957). Contra Strathmann, therefore, Wallace argues that the occurrence of *συμμαρτυροῦσης* in Romans 9:1—the only other instance where it is used together with a dative—is “surely” an instance of intensification, not association (Wallace 1996, 160–161; 2005). Having considered the lexical factors, Wallace turns to context and posits, on the basis that our spirits have no legal standing in the matter, that their testimonies would carry no weight. Thus, he concludes—on both lexical and contextual grounds—that the arguments for the joint-witness interpretation are flawed and the single-witness view holds.

Before evaluating these arguments, we remind ourselves what is at stake. Paul has argued in this passage that those in Christ (Rom 8:1) are both in the Spirit (Rom 8:9) and indwelt by the Spirit (Rom 8:11). They walk according to the Spirit (Rom 8:4), set their minds on the things of the Spirit (Rom 8:5), and are led by the Spirit as sons of God (Rom 8:14). This culminating indicative—“all who are led by the Spirit *are* sons of God” (Rom 8:14, emphasis added)—is grounded (cf. γάρ, “for,” Rom 8:15a) on the reality of verses 15 and 16, namely that believers no longer experience the fear of God’s judgement but instead the reality of a Father–son relationship with him. But how do believers know this to be true? Is this knowledge purely cognitive, or is there more to it? If sonship is the pinnacle of salvation (cf. God *sent* forth his Son ... *to redeem* those who were under the law, *so that* we might receive *adoption as sons*, Gal 4:5,

emphasis added), then do we know the reality of our sonship only by comprehension of the relevant redemptive-historical data? Or is there a present experience of sonship? Formerly we were slaves to sin and that objective status—"you were slaves of sin" (Rom 6:20; cf. 7:14b)—was accompanied by a subjective experience of our predicament before the Holy God, as confirmed by Paul's coupling of our status as slaves and the experience of fear (Rom 8:15). Now that we are sons, is there a corresponding subjective experience of our status before the Holy God? In sum: What *assurance* has the believer that he really is a son of God?

We have already considered the lexical evidence and found it insufficient of itself to establish the joint-witness interpretation. However, the fact that lexical factors allow—perhaps even favour—the single-witness view likewise does not settle the case. In the end, context must rule and, to that end, we must answer two related questions: To whom, and for whose benefit, is the witness of Romans 8:16 borne? Taking the latter first, God requires no testimony from any other to establish the certainty of the sonship of his elect. This is simply axiomatic: God knows. Thus, God is not the beneficiary of the testimony. Conversely, the adopted believer, having been freed from slavery, may still wonder if his new-found status as a son is real. The assurance intended by the witness is undoubtedly for the benefit of the believer. As to the former question, the joint-witness interpretation permits two possibilities, namely that witness is borne to God or to the spirit of the believer; and the single-witness view permits only one, namely that witness is borne to the spirit of the believer. In evaluating these options, we consider the question of whether the joint-witness or the single-witness interpretation better fulfils the purpose of the witness to be decisive. In comparing and contrasting the two, we believe that the joint-witness, rather than enhance assurance, may instead undermine it. Consider: The believer is the party in need of assurance; in what way could his own testimony to his status as son provide him with any assurance of that status? To put it rather crudely: If I need to participate as a joint-witness in persuading or reminding God, or myself, of my status as his son, that is not at all reassuring—quite the opposite.

The immediate context sharpens the point even further: Much as Paul has emphasised the objective fact that believers have been set free from the enslaving power of sin, and that they are no longer debtors to the flesh, he recognises that the actual,

experiential “[putting] to death [of] the deeds of the body” is an ongoing reality—as the present active indicative θανατώω (put to death, Rom 8:13) makes clear. It simply makes no sense to suggest that believers, under conviction of sin, burdened by guilt, and wrestling the tendency to “fall back into fear” (Rom 8:15) would in that moment of doubt gain any assurance of their sonship by their own testimony to the fact. Rather, it seems it is precisely in view of the potentially assurance-destroying doubt of just such moments that another party must testify and that his testimony must be to (i.e., not “with”) us: You are τέκνα θεοῦ (children of God, Rom 8:16). And who must this other party be? It can only be one of equal authority with God himself, one whose testimony is unassailable. Likewise, it can only be one who is able to provide an assurance that reaches deeper than a cognitive comprehension of the redemptive-historical data that points to and culminates in sonship—an assurance that is spiritually known. And further, that assurance must be ongoing—which is exactly what Paul indicates by the present active indicative συμμαρτυρέω (bears witness, Rom 8:16).

And thus, by consideration of both the lexical evidence and Paul’s pastoral intentions as expressed in the immediate context, we believe the weight of evidence better supports the single-witness interpretation: “The Spirit himself [in our ongoing struggle to actually put to death the deeds of the flesh, from whose tyranny we have been liberated] bears ongoing witness *to* our Spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:16, emphasis added).

Which brings us finally to the phrase—which occurs here and nowhere else—πνεῦμα υιοθεσίας (“Spirit of adoption as sons,” Rom 8:15). In this section Paul has already referred to the Spirit as the Spirit “of life” (Rom 8:2), “of God” (Rom 8:9, 14), “of Christ” (Rom 8:9), and “of him who raised Jesus from the dead” (Rom 8:11). The scope of the Spirit’s ministry makes the point that we live in the era of the Spirit, and that it is the Spirit—not obedience to the law—that now defines and characterises the believer’s sonship (cf. Rom 7:6). Though the final consummation of our sonship is still to come (cf. Rom 8:23) we, nevertheless, experience true sonship now—by the Spirit in the era of the Spirit. The contrast between the “spirit of slavery” and the “Spirit of adoption as sons” is not between two actual spirits but rather between the era of the law (as one of slavery and fear) and the era of the Spirit (Burke 1998, 315). In this new era the Spirit may rightly be called the πνεῦμα υιοθεσίας, where the noun υιοθεσίας is understood

as a genitive of quality. In other words, to have the Spirit is to be indwelt by the Spirit whose very nature it is to form sonship—and a very specific sonship at that—from within; for the “Spirit of adoption” (Rom 8:15) is the self-same “Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9).

This latter point is critical as we draw together the threads of our analysis of Romans 8:1–17 and attempt to state succinctly the role of the metaphor of adoption in it. The noun *υιοθεσία* does not stand alone in Paul’s argument—instead, it denotes a quality of the Spirit that must of necessity, therefore, not only attest the objective status of sonship of those in whom the Spirit dwells, but also animate the subjective reality and experience of it. Believers have been set free from sin and death by the “Spirit of life” (Rom 8:2) and are no longer debtors to the flesh (Rom 8:12). Instead, they are now “[sons of God who are] led by the Spirit of God” (Rom 8:14), and it is this new identity—“sons of God”—that motivates filial obedience. Thus, adoption is that by which new identity is both objectively conferred and subjectively formed.

“Adoption as sons” (Rom 8:15) is, therefore, the apex soteriological accomplishment of the argument, and the application of it, the formation of sonship from within, and the ongoing assurance of it by the “Spirit of adoption” are the culminating soteriological ministries of the Spirit.

2.5.4.2 Trinitarian purposes and actions

In a passage so dominated by the presence and ministry of the Spirit, there are nevertheless important things to learn about both the Father and the Son.

As to the Father, we note first that he sent his own Son (Rom 8:3)—indicating once again the pre-eminence of the Father in salvation. Further, it was the Father who “condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:4): he did not simply initiate the salvific process and then leave it to the Son and Spirit to complete; he was active at the pivotal moment. In fact, we see the same chain of events here in Romans 8:3–4 as we saw in Galatians 4:4–5:

God sent forth his Son ... to redeem those who were under the law ...
 ἵνα (so that) we might receive adoption as sons (Gal 4:4–5).

By sending his own Son ... he condemned sin in the flesh ... ἵνα (in order that) the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom 8:3–4).

In both of the above, the Father: (1) sends the Son (2) to the cross (which the parallel central clauses both allude to) (3) for a purpose beyond the cross (which the parallel final clauses both allude to). Paul's objectives in his letters to Galatia and Rome are different, and thus he emphasises different aspects of that purpose, but the final clauses nevertheless refer to the same reality, for, as we have already seen, the indwelling of the Spirit and the adoption of believers are realities so inextricably intertwined that Paul can, by the inspiration of the very same Spirit, speak of the "Spirit of adoption" (Rom 8:15). Thus Romans 8 confirms what we have already learnt from both the Ephesian and the Galatian letters, namely that the Father's goal with respect to his elect was not merely the justification of sinners but the adoption of sons. Moreover, it is the Father's will that those adopted sons live in his presence in eternity—as implied by Paul's assurance that "he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom 8:11; cf. Eph 1:14).

We note further that the Father sent not only the Son but also the Spirit. Paul says that believers λαμβάνω (receive(d), Rom 8:15) the Spirit. Delling says that, though λαμβάνω is ordinarily active, the passive sense predominates in theological discourse (Delling 1985, 495–496). With reference to Romans 8:15 specifically, *NIDNTTE* confirms that its theological use "often corresponds with God's giving" (*NIDNTTE*, 3:81–82). This sense accords with Paul's statement in Galatians that "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Gal 4:6).

But this passage does more than retread old paths. It adds to our understanding of the Father's purposes in adoption in this important way: It implies that we are able to please God. Paul says that those in the flesh "cannot please God" (Rom 8:8) and then goes on to explain that believers are not in the flesh (Rom 8:9) and owe no debt to the flesh (Rom 8:12). We noted earlier that the counterpoint to being a debtor "not to the flesh" is not stated and, bearing in mind the flow of argument back to the statement that those in the flesh cannot please God, the implication is that those in the Spirit—rather than

being motivated by the need to discharge any obligation to God—are motivated by the desire to please him. This is no surprise, as the “Spirit of adoption” (Rom 8:15) is the same “Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9); if Jesus’s foundational motivation was to please his Father (cf. John 8:29), then we expect the Spirit to form that same motivation within those adopted as sons.⁵⁵ Thus we learn from this passage that the Father is *pleasable*, and that the adoption and formation of sons does in fact bring him pleasure.

Shifting our attention to the Son, we note that it is only “in Christ” that believers have been set free from sin and death (Rom 8:2), and that this freedom is grounded (cf. γάρ, “for” in Rom 8:3) on the Son having already borne the condemnation (κατακρίνω, “condemned,” Rom 8:3)⁵⁶ of our sin. Thus, in Christ and because of his sacrifice, believers are free of the law of sin.

Paul goes on to teach that the “Spirit of adoption” (Rom 8:15) indwells the believer and forms sonship from within. Just a few verses earlier, though, he said that, since⁵⁷ the “Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9) dwells in a believer, Christ himself dwells in them (Rom 8:10). Paul is not conflating persons of the Trinity; rather, he is affirming that Christ and the Spirit are of such united purpose in their goal to “[communicate] ... the benefits of salvation [to believers]” (Moo 1996, 491) that he can speak of them interchangeably in that regard. Thus, if the inward formation of the life of sonship in those objectively given the status of sonship is the apex ministry of the Holy Spirit (with respect to believers), then the same may be said of the *present* ministry of the Son with respect to believers.

Finally, Paul says that those adopted are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). That believers are heirs “of” God could be understood in two ways: either that they are heirs of what God has promised (cf. Moo 1996, 505, who takes θεοῦ as a subjective genitive) or that they are heirs of God himself (cf. Murray 1997, 1:298; Schreiner 2018, 420–421, who take θεοῦ as an objective genitive). Once again lexical analysis alone will not decide the matter; we must turn to context to elucidate, and to

55 Paul confirms elsewhere that believers are able to live in such ways as do please God (cf. Rom 12:1; 14:18; Col 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Tim 2:1–3; 5:4).

56 Wallace explains that the aorist indicative “usually indicates *past* time with reference to the time of speaking” (Wallace 1996, 555, emphasis original), thus confirming that the condemnation of sin relates to a past event that, in context, can be identified as Christ’s death on the cross.

57 The ESV translates the adverbial conjunctions in Rom 8:9 and 10 as “if ... if” (εἴπερ ... εἰ), which gives the impression that Paul is unsure of whether or not his readers are indwelt by the Spirit. However, Wallace (1996, 674–675) affirms that both may be given either a conditional (“if”) or a causal (“since”) sense, and given the context, the causal seems to better express Paul’s intentions.

that end we ask: What does it mean to be a “fellow heir” (συγκληρονόμος) with Christ? Surely it means that the children of God will, jointly with Christ, become beneficiaries of *his* (i.e., Christ’s) inheritance. What, then, is his inheritance? The answer cannot be eternal life, as aseity has always been an attribute of the Son (cf. John 5:26). In his parable of the tenants and the vineyard, Jesus identifies himself as the heir and the eschatological kingdom as his inheritance (Matt 21:33–41; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19; cf. Isa 5:1–7; Ps 2:8). Thus, as a start, we identify the kingdom as Christ’s inheritance, which all the children of God will inherit jointly with him. Jesus himself confirms this in describing the parousia: “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, *inherit the kingdom* prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Matt 25:34, emphasis added; cf. Heb 1:2). There is a sense, therefore, in which we do inherit all that God has promised, provided we do not understand “kingdom” as a set (however valuable) of material goods but rather as the “royal reign of God” (BDAG, 168–169). It is the inheritance of the adopted sons of God, in other words, to share in the rule of God’s eschatological kingdom as fellow-regents with Christ. But this does not exhaust the meaning of our co-inheritance, for there undoubtedly is a sense in which it is the LORD himself who is our inheritance (cf. Ps 16:5; Lam 3:24), as we have already seen in our analysis of Ephesians 1:11–14.

Before concluding our discussion on this point, we ask: Is there any sense in which Christ gained something—post his resurrection and exaltation—that was not already his before his incarnation? We believe there are two dimensions to Christ’s inheritance that are highlighted by this question. First, the Old Testament pointed forward to the LORD’s own redeemed people as his inheritance (cf. Deut 4:20; 32:9; Isa 19:25), and Paul sees this inheritance realised in the saints (cf. Eph 1:18). Thus, strange though it seems to say it, we—adopted sons of God—are one another’s inheritance.

If the last point seemed strange, this final one seems to skirt the edges of grave presumption: There is a sense in which the adopted sons of God will share the glory that is Christ’s. It is not that the Son lacked glory before the incarnation and gained it after his exaltation; as the Second Person of the Trinity, glory was already his (cf. John 17:5). Yet it is also true that, as the incarnate God-man, a glory was given him in the reward of his exaltation (cf. Phil 2:9, *διό*, “*therefore* God has highly exalted him,”

emphasis added).⁵⁸ Here we tread carefully, for the LORD is clear that his glory is his alone (cf. Isa 42:8)—yet Paul does conclude this unit with reference to the glory that the adopted will one day share with Christ (cf. Rom 8:17). Murray explains:

Just as Christ in his sufferings, death, and resurrection cannot be contemplated apart from those on whose behalf he suffered, died, and rose again, so in the glory bestowed upon him as the reward of his finished work he cannot be contemplated apart from them. And they in the state of glory cannot be contemplated apart from him (Murray 1997, 1:298).

We noted in our earlier discussion that adoption and the Spirit belong inextricably to one another and, as we have already given substantial attention to the particular ministry of the Spirit in relation to the adoption metaphor of Romans 8:15, there is no need to repeat that analysis here.

2.5.5 Romans 8:23

It may be tempting, given the proximity of the two occurrences of υιοθεσία in Romans 8, to import meaning from the former (i.e., Rom 8:15) into the latter (i.e., Rom 8:23). Heim, however, cautions against the tendency to transplant meaning from one context to another “without giving adequate thought to how metaphorical meaning is produced” (2014, 49). She argues that attempts to find a single meaning of the metaphor are misguided and that—as meaning occurs at the level of the utterance and is not necessarily transferred from one usage to another—it is better to speak of the various evocations of the metaphor as they occur in each context (Heim 2014, 49–59). We shall be careful, therefore, to account for both the overall argument of Romans Chapter 8 and the specific nuances of metaphoric meaning in verse 23: “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.”

⁵⁸ Bavinck (2011, 453) concurs: “His exaltation is thus a real change, a state gained as a reward of his obedience.”

2.5.5.1 Structure, discourse, and rhetoric

We have already presented our overview of the big picture of Paul's argument in Chapters 1 through 8 of Romans in 2.6.4.1 above. With that big picture in mind, Paul's argument in verses 1–17 of Chapter 8 is that there is no condemnation for those in Christ (for his death has set them free from the condemnatory power of the law) and that those in Christ are in the Spirit and are empowered to and sustained in filial obedience by the same indwelling Spirit. Paul goes on in verses 18–30 to exhort believers to endure suffering in this age in the certain knowledge that incomparable glory awaits them.

Before attending to the details of this unit, we make two preliminary observations. First, this section (i.e., Rom 8:18–30) is related to the preceding (i.e., Rom 8:12–17) by means of the explanatory conjunction γάρ (for, Rom 8:18). In particular, it is intended to develop the relationship between the suffering the children of God will endure *now* (note the present active indicative of συμπράσχω, “suffer with”) and the glory that they will share with Christ *later* (cf. Rom 8:17b). Second, we note the *now–later* temporal framework that underlies Paul's thought in this unit. Along these lines we note Paul's contrast of “this present time” with a time in which something (i.e., glory) is yet “to be revealed” (v. 18). Likewise, the creation now “waits with eager longing” for the future “revealing of the sons of God” (v. 19). Similarly, the creation “was subjected to futility” and is now still in that state of futility, waiting for the time when it “will be set free” (vv. 20–21). And not just the creation, but the children of God too, now “groan inwardly as we wait” for a future happening—namely “adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (v. 23).

Having noted the temporal framework of this unit, and that it develops the *suffer-with-Christ-now* for the sake of *glory-with-Christ-later* dynamic introduced in verse 17, we ask two questions. First: In what way does this unit illuminate the *suffer-now* for *glory-later* dynamic? Second: How does the metaphor of adoption function within it?

In response to the first, we begin by noting Paul's basic thesis in verse 18: the sufferings that God's children endure in this present time, when weighed on the scale against the glory that will be revealed to them in the age to come, are as mere dust. Straightforward as that encouragement is, however, its relationship to verses 19–25 is

less clear. The γάρ (for) at the beginning of verse 19 indicates that what follows is the ground of the assurance offered in verse 18—but which of the several elements of that assurance does the fact that “creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (v. 19) undergird? Does Paul mean to confirm the greatness, or the certainty, or the futurity, of what awaits the children of God?⁵⁹ Moo (1996, 513) believes verses 19–25 support “to be revealed” in verse 18 by developing both the sense of futility and the yearning of God’s children (together with the creation) for the transformation that is to come. Schreiner says that Paul means to “dazzle his readers with the attractiveness and beauty of future glory” (Schreiner 2018, 425). While both of these proposals make sense, it seems to us that Paul’s main emphasis in verse 18 is on the *incomparability* of what is to be revealed to God’s children over against the sufferings of this present time, and so all that follows from verse 19 in this unit tends to support and develop that idea. To that end Paul begins by sketching the big picture of the kinds of sufferings that characterise the present age before elucidating the incomparable glory that characterises the next.

With respect to the former, the sufferings of this age include both persecutions endured specifically as a result of a believer’s allegiance to Christ (cf. “suffer with [Christ],” v. 17) and those experienced as a result of living in a fallen world (e.g., sickness, loss, pain, relational dysfunction, injustice, conflict, and death). But not only do God’s children suffer in the present time (v. 18); the entire sub-human creation remains subject to futility (v. 20; cf. Gen 3:17b–18) and in bondage to corruption (v. 21). Subjection to futility undoubtedly refers to God’s curse on this part of the created order (cf. Gen 3:17b–18) and the consequent “frustration which the forces of nature meet with in achieving their proper ends” (cf. Murray 1997, 1:303). Precisely what is meant by creation’s bondage to corruption is less clear. Commentators do not agree on whether the genitival construction δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς (bondage to corruption, v. 21) should be taken as subjective (i.e., the bondage that results from corruption, cf. Cranfield 1975, cited in Moo 1996, 517), objective (i.e., the state or condition of being in bondage to corruption, cf. BDAG, 1055), appositional (i.e., the bondage that consists in corruption, cf. Murray 1997, 1:304), or qualitative (i.e., bondage characterised by corruption, noted as a possibility by Turner 1963 in Moo 1996, 517). Moo and Schreiner

59 See Hodge 1968, 269; Moo 1996, 513; Murray 1997, 1:301; and Schreiner 2018, 425 for the various ways in which the relationship of v. 19 to v. 18 may be understood.

believe the objective sense is most likely: “Creation is enslaved to corruption, which means that decay and death pervade the natural world” (Schreiner 2018, 428). Granting that the nuances are fine, we believe that, as the referent is the sub-human, non-rational creation, the corruption in view cannot be ethical in nature and the oppositional interpretation that sees bondage as consisting in corruption and death is more likely. Whatever the nuances, though, the main idea is clear: creation is not only subject to the frustration of not being able to achieve the goal of its creation, but also in bondage to corruption, decay, and death. Not only is it unable to move positively towards its goal—it is locked to a negative regress, the endpoint of which is death.

Against the sufferings of this age, Paul develops the glory of the next to show the incomparability of the two. First, he says, it is a glory that is to be ἀποκαλυφθῆναι εἰς ἡμᾶς (revealed to us, v. 18). Here Paul anticipates the answer to Christ’s own prayer at the Last Supper: “Father, I desire that they ... may be with me where I am, *to see my glory*” (John 17:24, emphasis added). But, as Paul has already assured believers that they will be glorified “with [Christ]” (v. 17), we see that even more is intended. Indeed, believers will be not merely spectators to, but partakers of, Christ’s own glory—such that Paul can speak of the moment of fulfilment as τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ θεοῦ (the revealing of the sons of God, v. 19). The status and privilege of believers as sons of God will be made known. Not only that, but the process of transformation into that which believers now are objectively in status only will reach its design—namely, they will be like Christ himself (cf. 1 John 3:2; 1 Cor 15:51–53). At that same time the rest of creation will be set free from bondage to corruption and obtain τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ θεοῦ (“the freedom of the glory of the children of God” in v. 21). Paul’s encouragement to believers to endure, patiently, the sufferings of this age culminates in the fully realised sonship of the age of glory—at which time the children of God will receive υιοθεσίαν ... τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν (“adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” in v. 23). Both creation and the adopted sons of God will experience full and final deliverance from the corruption and death that mark this age.

It is the knowledge of the incomparability of the glory that awaits the children of God that fortifies them for the sufferings they endure now. And endure them they must—for this was the path of Christ himself (cf. Rom 8:17; Heb 12:1–2). Thus the children of

God look forward to “not merely the *end* of suffering but its *goal*” (*NIDNTTE*, 3:673, emphasis original).

In examining the function of the metaphor of adoption with the argument, and in light of the inextricability of the Spirit from adoption that we noted in the previous section, we attend first to the phrase τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος (“the firstfruits of the Spirit” in v. 23).

The use of “firstfruits” in Romans 8:23 denotes “the first instalment and guarantee of the eschatological redemption, i.e. the resurrection” (*NIDNTTE*, 1:347). In other words, the giving of Spirit both evidences the beginning of eschatological redemption and guarantees the completion of it. In this sense the Spirit is a pledge of God’s commitment to the full realisation of salvation—and certainly Paul intends just that meaning elsewhere (cf. 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14). In this instance, though, Murray takes the genitive not as appositional but rather as partitive and argues on the basis of the analogy of Scripture⁶⁰ that firstfruits should be understood as a “token gift of the Spirit given to believers now as the pledge of the plenitude of the Spirit to be bestowed at the resurrection” (Murray 1997, 1:306–307). A decision is not easy, but we believe the broader context favours the partitive interpretation. This section of Paul’s argument begins in Romans 5, in which Adam’s sin is contrasted with Christ’s obedience and the condemnation and death that resulted from the former is conquered by the grace and life secured by the latter. But Adam is not merely the progenitor and representative of the human race; he is also—in a passage that begins with Jesus being identified as the Father’s “beloved Son; with [whom he is] well pleased” (Luke 3:22)—the first “son of God”⁶¹ (Luke 3:38) in the lineage of failed sons pre-Christ. Thus, insofar as Adam was “a type of the one who was to come” (Rom 5:14), his sonship anticipated the true Son who was to come—namely, Christ. Significantly, Christ’s sonship is characterised by the presence of the Spirit (cf. Luke 3:22) in a way that is not true of any other son of God in Luke’s lineage (cf. Luke 3:23–38).⁶² Thus it is right to expect that, inherent

60 Murray (1997, 1:306) cites Rom 11:16; 16:5; 1 Cor 15:20; 16:15; Jas 1:18; and Rev 14:4 in support.

61 In the sense that he bore the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26–27).

62 This is not to deny that some were endowed with the Spirit at times and for special purposes in the Lord’s grace—rather, it is to recognise that, to whatever extent they experienced the empowering presence of the Spirit, their lives were not marked by the presence and power of the Spirit in the same way Jesus’s was (cf. John 3:34).

within the full realisation of the believer's adoptive sonship in the age of glory will be a fullness of indwelling by the Spirit that we enjoy now only, comparatively, as a token. Thus, once again, we see that adoption and the Spirit belong inextricably one to another. Whereas Romans 8:15 illuminates the believer's experience of that reality in "this present time" (v. 18), verse 23 anticipates an experience of it greater in proportion as the age of glory shall be greater than this. And the fullness, of which we now experience only the firstfruits, is expressed in terms of adoption (v. 23).

Finally, we note that Paul parallels the adoption for which we eagerly wait with the "redemption of our bodies" (v. 23). BDAG gives the sense of ἀπολύτρωσις (redemption, v. 23) in this context as "release from a captive condition" (BDAG, 117). The broader context helps us identify this captive condition as the "death [that] reigned through [Adam]" (Rom 5:17). Just as it is true that we have been adopted as sons (cf. Rom 8:15) and that there remains an ultimate realisation of that adoption (cf. Rom 8:23), it is likewise true that we have been redeemed (Gal 4:5) and that there remains an ultimate realisation of that redemption (Rom 8:23). It is particularly noteworthy that the phrase τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν ("the redemption of our bodies") is appositional—in other words, that it defines the nature of the adoption envisaged. Recalling our earlier analysis of the Old Testament background that informed Paul's thought, we are not at all surprised to find redemption and adoption so closely intertwined. Indeed, when we consider the strong emphasis Paul places on predestination just a few verses later (cf. Rom 8:28–30, 33) we see the nexus of election, redemption, the Fatherhood of God, and the sonship of Israel that we noted earlier come to full flower in the adoption of believers. Thus we see that adoption as sons functions in Romans 8:23 as the apex soteriological reality towards which all of redemptive history is moving and for which all of creation eagerly longs.

2.5.5.2 Trinitarian purposes and actions

This section is similar to the last in that the ministry of the Spirit receives the lion's share of Paul's attention. Nevertheless, some observations about the Father and the Son may be made.

We note that it was the Father who subjected creation to futility. This is clearly a reference to the curse of Genesis 3:17b–18, and the fact that he subjected it "in hope"

that it would one day be liberated from death (Rom 8:20) is a reference to the corresponding promise of Genesis 3:15. But, as creation's hope is bound up with the revelation of the sons of God (Rom 8:19), and as we have already noted the *in-Adam* to *in-Christ* (cf. especially our discussion on Rom 5) arc of the sonship motif, this implies that the Father already had the accomplishment of adoptive sonship in mind on that cool afternoon in Eden (cf. Gen 3:8). By now this does not surprise us, as the Father's predestining role in adoption has already been amply substantiated and is further attested in Paul's stirring conclusion to this section of his argument (cf. Rom 8:29–30).

The Father's providence is also in view in this passage insofar as his ultimate agency ensures that "all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). That his providence is outworked within the framework of adoption is seen in that the "good" he directs is that his elect would be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29). Schreiner (2018, 442) says that this "good" is eschatological—in other words, that believers will be fully conformed to Christ's likeness in the age to come. Moo concurs on the grounds that parallel passages such as Philippians 3:21 and 1 Corinthians 15:49 are certainly eschatological and that "eschatology is Paul's focus in this paragraph" (Moo 1996, 354–535). In response we would argue that similar words and logic can be used to make different points in different contexts, and so we are hesitant to import meaning from Paul's other letters into this one in the absence of corroborating evidence in the immediate context. Further, while Moo is correct in saying that Paul's focus *in this paragraph* is on eschatology, we recall that the entire section serves to develop the *suffer-with-Christ-now* for the sake of *glory-with-Christ-later* arc of Romans 8:17. More fundamentally, therefore, Paul's focus is on *now*—not *later*. With that framework in mind, and without denuding Paul's argument of eschatological content—for undoubtedly it is there in, for example, the believer's glorification in verse 30—we are not persuaded that this is what Paul has in mind in verse 29. Rather, given the strong emphasis on believers living by the Spirit, walking according to the Spirit, and being led by the Spirit in the first half of Chapter 8, we believe it better fits the context to understand verse 29 as fortifying believers for ongoing sanctification in this life. Just as the Spirit experientially reassures the children of God of the objectivity of their filial status in the midst of ongoing sanctification (Rom 8:14–16), so too the knowledge that the Father predestined them

to conformity to the image of the Son strengthens them to the endurance commended in verses 17b–18. Thus the Father’s providence, grounded on his predestining, is to the end that his adopted sons would increasingly conform to the likeness of his beloved and well-pleasing Son.

In summary we may say of the Father that the accomplishment of the adoption of his elect was the focus of all his salvific activity from Adam to Christ; the spiritual formation of his adopted sons directs the outworking of his providence between the cross and the parousia; and the full realisation of the adoption of his chosen sons is the glorification that his sovereignty underwrites.

Although Paul makes little mention of the Son in this passage, all the salvific benefits that accrue to the believer—culminating in adoption—do so on the basis of the Son’s ministry, as expounded in Chapter 5. Yet little direct mention does not mean we cannot discern reference to the Son, the most important of which is the *suffer-with-Christ-now* for the sake of *glory-with-Christ-later* dynamic that this whole section develops. As the full realisation of adoption functions as the capstone promise that fortifies the children of God for endurance in their suffering now, we may therefore see Christ as the exemplary suffering Son in whose footsteps adopted sons are to follow (cf. Rom 8:29a). Those who endure in this way demonstrate the veracity of their adoption and their status as “fellow-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). That said, and even though they are called his “brothers,” that Christ is called the πρωτότοκον (firstborn, Rom 8:29) denotes that he retains pre-eminence as *the* Son above all other sons—“above them in rank and dignity, since he remains their Lord” (*NIDNTTE*, 4:180).

With respect to the Spirit, we see that his ministry is not only to reassure believers of their filial status (vv. 15–16) but also to “intercede for the saints” (vv. 26–27) in accordance with the will of God. That will, as it relates to the present time, is that they “be conformed to the image of his Son” (v. 29). Louw and Nida explain that the word συμμόρφους (conformed, v. 29) indicates that the Father set his elect apart “that they might be similar in form to the nature of his Son” (L&N, §LN58.5).⁶³ In context it is clear that Paul has in mind the internal nature (i.e. the moral character) of Christ. Recalling

⁶³ In the same section Louw and Nida explain that the root word μορφή denotes “the nature or character of something” (L&N, §LN58.2).

that the Spirit is, earlier in this passage, called the “Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9), and that “all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Rom 8:15), we are not surprised to discover that a significant emphasis of the present ministry of the Spirit is the formation of adopted sons into the likeness of the beloved and well-pleasing Son (cf. Luke 3:22). Thus the same Spirit who assures us of the reality of our sonship to God (Rom 8:15–16) and who will one day complete our redemption by raising our bodies from the dead (Rom 8:11, 23) works now to form the life of sonship within us (Rom 8:26–29).

2.6 The doctrine of adoption in the Pauline corpus: A summary of key emphases

This chapter relates to our first subsidiary question, and in it we have described what the Pauline corpus teaches about the soteriological accomplishment of adoption and about the purposes and actions of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in relation to it. We conclude by affirming five key emphases arising from our analysis.

First, we affirm that the doctrine of adoption, as presented in the Pauline corpus, does function as an organising soteriological metaphor in that it embraces the full arc of redemptive history from the pre-temporal to the eschatological. Paul grounds adoption in the Father’s pre-temporal election (Eph 1:5), shows that it was present in seed form in the covenantal sonship of Israel (Rom 9:4), teaches that its accomplishment was the goal of Christ’s incarnation and the ultimate soteriological reason for the cross (Gal 4:5), explains that the adopted are empowered to lives of obedient sonship by the indwelling Spirit of adoption and are sustained in this by the subjective assurance of the Father’s love even though their obedience is often wanting (Rom 8:15), and exhorts the adopted to endure through the sufferings that obedient sonship will inevitably attract in this world by the assurance that the consummation of their adoptive sonship will be an experience incomparably greater than their present sufferings (Rom 8:23). Redemption history is the story of adoptive sonship purposed, promised, foreshadowed, accomplished, applied, and consummated.

Second, we believe the exegetical evidence bears out the claim that Paul sees adoption to sonship as the apex of salvific accomplishment. This is adequately established in Ephesians 1 alone, in which adoption functions as the pre-eminent soteriological accomplishment that serves, with respect to the believer, as that which

conveys the content of all spiritual blessings with which the believer is blessed and, with respect to the Father, as that for which the glory of the Father is to be praised. The best-crafted jewel, though, is cut so as to multiply radiance by its many aspects. So too adoption multiplies the radiance of God's grace. In addition to what we have seen in Ephesians 1, the themes of covenant and of redemption shine from Romans 9:4, as do the mystery of the incarnation, the obedience of Christ, the triumph of the cross, and the unfolding of the Father's redemptive purposes in history from Galatians 4. The ministry of the Spirit of adoption blazes from Romans 8:15, and it is in terms of adoption that the consummating glory envisaged in Romans 8:23 likewise beams. Considered in sum, adoption is soteriology's crowning jewel.

Third, we affirm that, though conceptually distinguishable, the accomplishment of adoption and the coming of the age of the Spirit are inextricably conjoined realities. Quite simply, the Spirit of the Son *is* the Spirit of adoption, *is* the Spirit who witnesses to the adopted concerning the Father's love as they model their own sonship on the joy-filled obedience of Christ Jesus *the* Son, and *is* the Spirit who sustains adopted sons in hope and obedience as they await the consummation of their adoption.

Fourth, we affirm that the doctrine of adoption presents a picture of salvation in which transformation in Christlikeness is not an optional extra but is inherent to the nature of salvation. By locating adoption within the arc of sonship, with which the notions of the image of God and likeness to him are bound up, and of which Christ is the exemplar, Paul expounds an intrinsically transformative soteriology.

Finally, we affirm that the doctrine of adoption provides a distinct lens through which to view the united purpose and distinct actions of the three persons of the Trinity. Though more could be said, adoption seems most brightly to highlight the electing grace of the Father and his sovereign rule in the working out of his purposes in history; the joy-filled obedience of the Son in all things for the pleasure of his Father, and this as the essence of sonship to which the adopted aspire; and the indwelling ministry of the Spirit of adoption to assure the adopted of the Father's love, work Christlikeness into their souls, and sustain them in the certainty of the consummation of their adoption in the age to come.

Having thus examined the presentation of adoption in the Pauline corpus, we shall in the next chapter examine the development of the doctrine of adoption through church history, beginning with the church fathers of the post-apostolic era. We will be especially alert to the presence of the five emphases summarised above as we do so.

CHAPTER 3

THE DOCTRINE OF ADOPTION: A HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY SURVEY

3.1 *Introduction*

The previous chapter answered our first subsidiary question by exploring the doctrine of adoption as presented in the Pauline corpus. This chapter relates to our second subsidiary question, namely: What have theologians past and present taught about the doctrine of adoption?

Our analysis of historical and contemporary treatment of the doctrine of adoption will proceed chronologically beginning with the patristic and medieval periods, followed by the Reformation, the Reformed Scholastics, the English Puritans, the Dutch Further Reformation and, finally, with an analysis of contemporary scholarship. Our analysis of the patristic era will include a survey of the church fathers, with a particular focus on Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Augustine. Our analysis of the medieval era will focus on Anselm and Aquinas, and of the Reformation era on Calvin. The Reformed Scholastics will be represented by Turretin, the Puritans by Westminster, Perkins, Ames, and Watson, and the Dutch Second Reformation by Brakel. Contemporary scholarship will be represented by Burke and Garner. The chapter will conclude with a brief summary of key emphases with respect to the doctrine of adoption in church history.

3.2 *The patristic era*

The church fathers of the patristic era were the theologians of the early church following the time of the apostles (i.e., from c. AD 100) until about the mid- to late

eighth century.⁶⁴ We shall present a chronological survey of the doctrine of adoption in the writings of the fathers, attending first to those of the ante-Nicene period, and second to those of the Nicene and post-Nicene periods. We will pay particular attention to Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Augustine as we come to them.

3.2.1 The doctrine of adoption in the ante-Nicene period

The doctrine of adoption began to appear in the writings of the early church even during the apostolic era. In early liturgies attributed to the apostle James and Mark the Evangelist, for example, adoption functions as a synonym for salvation (cf. *The Divine Liturgy of James* [ANF 7:550]; *The Divine Liturgy of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark* [ANF 7:560]). Similarly, in such writings as *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, adoption frequently features as the pre-eminent metaphor for salvation (e.g., *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* [ANF 7:410, 412, 470, 476, 477]). Clement of Rome (c. AD 35–99), in his *Recognitions*, posits adopted sonship as the goal of the creation of mankind (*Recognitions of Clement* [ANF 8:136]). That said, he uses adoption not as a soteriological metaphor but rather to denote some kind of pre-fall participation in the divine nature itself. Similarly, the gnostic philosopher-theologian Theodotus⁶⁵ uses adoption to describe the highest state of relationship of man to God in which, though the influence of the underlying Pauline texts is evident, so too is a mystical or gnostic overlay that seems to decouple the metaphor from its Pauline foundations (e.g., *Excerpts of Theodotus* [ANF 8:45, 47]). Even though some of these early interpreters adopted hermeneutical principles we would regard with suspicion, nevertheless it was to the metaphor of adoption specifically that they attached the highest privileges of salvation.

The first major theologian of the patristic era to treat adoption in depth was Irenaeus of Lyon (c. AD 130–202). References to adoption pervade his writings to the extent that Fairburn says, “the heart of [Irenaeus’s] soteriology is the idea of adoption” (2007, 295). His first description of Christian believers in *Against Heresies IV* is “those who

64 Grenz, Guretzki, and Nordling (1999, s.v. Patristic Era) identify the patristic era as c. 100–750.

With respect to the Eastern Orthodox tradition, though, some would see the patristic era extending to the mid-fourteenth century. Nevertheless, Wright holds that, at least with respect to the Western fathers, the patristic period ends with Nicaea II in 787 (Wright 2000, 495).

65 In prefatory remarks the editors note that precisely which of three or four possible writers—all named Theodotus—authored this work cannot be known with certainty. They further note that all were heretics (*Excerpts of Theodotus* [ANF 8:41]).

receive the Spirit of adoption” (*Adversus Haereses* [ANF 1:463]), and he elsewhere identifies the church likewise as those who have received adoption (*ibid.*, 419, 561).

Indeed, it appears to be more than a favoured soteriological metaphor but rather an organising principle of his theology. This is hinted at in his descriptions of God’s people under the former and latter dispensations as being called “under the law” and “by adoption” respectively (*Adversus Haereses* [ANF 1:515])—the latter more fully described as “the fullness of the times of the adoption” (*ibid.*, 452). Along the same lines, the Father’s sovereignty over creation and salvation is expressed through his giving “after the manner of creation” and “after the manner of adoption” respectively (*ibid.*, 546).

Following in Paul’s footsteps, Irenaeus sees God’s promises to Abraham as fulfilled in adoption conferred through Christ (*Adversus Haereses* [ANF 1:471]). Confirming this, in his *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, in which he aimed to set out the main features of the apostolic message for the instruction of new converts, Irenaeus describes the end-time dealings of God with believers as being under the “covenant of adoption” (1920, 8). Furthermore, according to Irenaeus, Christ’s own understanding of the entire salvific enterprise is summarised as the “adoption of sons ... which is eternal life, [which] takes place through himself” (*ibid.*, 370; cf. 448, 450). He goes further still to describe the adoption of believers as the very goal of Christ’s incarnation (*ibid.*, 441) and to make the pouring out of the Spirit contingent upon its accomplishment (*ibid.*, 538).

Against Heresies, polemical though it is, is not devoid of pastoral insight. Irenaeus here argues that it is by adoption that men are granted to know, love, and obey God as Father (*Adversus Haereses* [ANF 1:482]). It is adoption to sonship specifically, in other words, that enables the believer to fulfil the Great Commandment (cf. Matt 22:35–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:27). Moreover, he argues elsewhere, adoption entails not just heartfelt obedience to, but true spiritual communion with, the Father through the Son (*ibid.*, 448).⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Fairburn argues that adoption in Irenaeus’s thought is entwined with the idea of participation in God—by which he means spiritual communion with God: “Our sharing in the divine life consists of our receiving from Christ the grace of his own relationship to the Father” (Fairburn 2007, 295). Fairburn is careful to distinguish this idea of participation as essentially relational from the

Following Irenaeus in the late second and early third century, Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150–215) sometimes uses the word adoption as a synonym for salvation (e.g., *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* [ANF 2:340, 364, 413, 416, 421, 496, 497]). At times, though, it appears to be more than merely a synonym, as the metaphor of adoption is the one he chooses in order to defend the privileged position of God’s children under the new covenant compared to those who lived under the law (*Paedagogus* [ANF 2:218]). Adoption is also used to denote that which believers are by grace in contradistinction to that which Christ is by nature (*Stromata* [ANF 2:346]).

For Clement, in similar vein to Irenaeus (though not as extensively developed), adoption denotes more than the legal superiority of the latter covenant. For it is in terms of the reality of adoption that he expounds the affection of the Father for those he has “begotten ... by His Spirit” (*Paedagogus* [ANF 2:214]) and their growth in Christlikeness (*Stromata* [ANF 2:506]).

Around the same time, Tertullian (c. 155–220 AD), in listing the ends for which the Father sent his Son, has the redemption of those under the law—by which he means Jews—in first place and the adoption to sonship of Gentiles as second (*Adversus Marcionem* [ANF 3:436]). Adoption, in other words, is the co-leading soteriological accomplishment that motivated the sending of the Son: redemption (of the Jews) and adoption (of the Gentiles) together describe the salvific purpose of the Father towards all mankind.

Hippolytus (c. 170–235 AD), in *Against Beron and Helix*, makes several assertions regarding adoption. First, he interprets John the Baptist’s proclamation that Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16) as meaning that Jesus will give the gift of adoption (*Against Beron and Helix* [ANF 5:235]). Second, he describes Jesus’s own baptism as being the means by which he acquired the authority to give the gift of adoption (ibid., 236). While the logic of these assertions is unclear, Hippolytus goes on to describe the growth in holiness of those “begotten ... into the adoption of God” as inherent to salvation (*Against Beron and Helix* [ANF

understanding of participation as mystical *theōsis* that is present in some of the fathers of the Eastern church.

5:237]). Echoing the logic of the apostle Paul (cf. Rom 8:1–15), he describes such begotten sons as “putting off the bondage, and putting on the adoption” (ibid., 237).

Origen (c. 184–253 AD) sometimes uses adoption merely as a synonym for salvation or union with Christ (*De Principiis* [ANF 4:379]) but does also go further. In *Against Celsus* he explains the devotion of the believer to the worship of God alone in terms of adoption. The spiritual communion of those “imbued with that excellent spirit of adoption” with God is precious to them, and they would not deprive themselves of it by the worship or service of any other (*Contra Celsus* [ANF 4:642]). In his *Commentary on Matthew* he links the ideas of sonship and spiritual formation by using the metaphor of adoption to explain that sons—whether sons of the “prince of this world” or of God—bear likeness to their father (*Commentary on Matthew* [ANF 9:442]).

Moving into the latter part of the third century, Gregory Thaumaturgus (c. 213–270 AD) in his *Second Homily* chooses adoption as his descriptor of the believer’s inheritance in a highly mystical description of the spiritual life (*Second Homily on the Annunciation to the Holy Virgin Mary* [ANF 6:62]). Victorinus of Pettau (died c. 303 AD) in his commentary on Revelation interprets the white stone of Revelation 2:17 as adoption to sonship and uses adoption as an all-encompassing metaphor for salvation (*Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John* [ANF 7:347, 349]). While we would question their hermeneutics, these interpretations nevertheless indicate the elevated value of the metaphor of adoption in soteriological thought of the time. Similarly indicating the high place of adoption, Methodius of Olympus (c. 250–311 AD) in his *Oration* places a long prayer on the lips of Simeon (a greatly expanded version of Simeon’s prayer in Luke 2:28–32), in which the highest blessing and pinnacle of salvation is to be received into the adoption of sonship (*Oration Concerning Simeon and Anna* [ANF 6:389]).

In the latter years of the pre-Nicene era, Pope Alexander I of Alexandria (died c. 326 AD), in upholding the deity of Christ in his refutation of Arianism, was careful to distinguish between sonship that is by nature and belongs to Christ alone, and sonship received by adoption—yet it should not be missed that it is adoptive sonship that is the highest achievement of the gospel in his thought (*Epistles on the Arian Heresy* [ANF 6:293–294]). In the same period, Lactantius (c. 250–325 AD), in his *Divine Institutes*, wrote of adoption as a blessing for Gentiles following the Jewish rejection of Christ

(*Institutiones Divinae* [ANF 7:123, 242]). While we would take issue with the author's exegesis, it is nevertheless instructive that it is the metaphor of adoption that is selected as the all-embracing descriptor of salvation.

3.2.2 The doctrine of adoption in the Nicene and post-Nicene periods

Arguably the leading theologian of the Nicene era was Athanasius (c. 293–373). Given his pivotal role in the battle against the Arian heresy, we should not be surprised to find the doctrine of the Sonship of Christ close to the centre of Athanasius's theology. In his first of four *Discourses against the Arians*, for example, he argues that 'Father' is the truer title for God than is 'Unoriginate' (as proposed by the Arians) for, not only is it scriptural, but it implies both "a Son, and our adoption as sons" (*Discourse 1* [NPNF² 4:324]). With regard to our adoption, he is clear that it is only through Christ—the "Offspring of the Father's essence" (ibid., 329)—that it is accomplished. Like others before him, Athanasius was careful to distinguish between the pre-eminent Sonship of Christ that is by nature, and the sonship of believers by adoption (*Discourse 2* [NPNF² 4:380]; *Discourse 3* [NPNF² 4:398–399]). And, again like others before him, he appears at times to conflate Paul's doctrine of adoption with John's teaching on the new birth (ibid.).

Athanasius also noted the close relationship between adoption and the Spirit, though he appears again to commingle the apostles by citing from John's Prologue (John 1:12–13) as a proof text for Paul's metaphor. Nevertheless, he rightly treads in Paul's footsteps by following this with an explanation that sonship entails sanctification (*Discourse 3* [NPNF² 4:404–405]).

Adoption featured prominently in the theology of Cyril of Jerusalem (313–386). In a baptismal liturgy, for example, the metaphor of adoption stands for the whole new life of the believer who, after being symbolically crucified and buried with Christ, then rises "to the adoption which is in Him" (*Catechetical Lectures* [NPNF² 7:xxiii]). In the same context, a list of the great blessings of salvation—including "a new-birth of the soul ... a chariot to heaven; the delight of Paradise"—reaches its climax in "the gift of adoption" (ibid., 5). In his lectures to new believers preparing for baptism, Cyril calls adoption into service to explain that they are the recipients of that which was long ago promised to Abraham (ibid., 30). Similarly, he explains both their liberation from slavery to sin

(*ibid.*, 6) and the pre-eminence of Christ, who “is” the Father’s Son (cf. Matt 3:17) in contradistinction to those who “receivest it by adoption” (*ibid.*, 17, 45–46, 58, 64–66). It is telling that much of Cyril’s instruction to catechumens—by which he sought to inculcate the conceptual structures of a Christian worldview—was expounded with reference to adoptive sonship.⁶⁷

Basil of Caesarea (c. 329–379), like so many others, leans on the distinction between the adoptive sonship of believers and the essential Sonship of Christ to defend the latter’s divinity (*Prolegomena: Sketch of the Life and Works of St. Basil* [NPNF² 8:xli]). In his work *On the Holy Spirit* (NPNF² 8:17), Basil argues that regenerating grace is given in baptism. While we would contest his position on the relationship between regeneration and baptism, it is nevertheless revealing that in this argument Basil names “the grace of adoption” (i.e., that which is received in baptism, per his argument) as “the most honourable of all” (*ibid.*). He recognises the inextricability of the Spirit from adoption when he argues that apart from the Spirit of adoption it is impossible for the believer to properly relate to either Father or Son in worship or prayer (*ibid.*, 18), and that the ultimate hope of the believer—namely “the kingdom of heaven” (*ibid.*, 22)—is to be obtained through adoption. Indeed, in his *Letter to the Sozopolitans*, Basil recounts all of redemptive history as preparatory for the accomplishment of adoption (*Letters* [NPNF² 8:186]).

Gregory Nazianzen (329–390), in defending the deity of the Holy Spirit, lists the title “Spirit of Adoption” among his many appellations (*Select Orations* [NPNF² 7:327, 382]) and elsewhere uses the metaphor as synonymous with salvation (*ibid.*, 439). Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395) says that the believer’s sonship is the result of his being joined to Christ (*Against Eunomius* [NPNF² 5:149]) but, in view of the Christological controversies of the time, it is no surprise that he made a point of the distinction between Christ—the Father’s “own” Son—and those sons whose filial status is by adoption (*ibid.*, 109, 183–184). Gregory also emphasised the relationship between adoption and the Spirit (*ibid.*, 191–192). Granted, this was part of his defence of

67 We are not surprised by now to find that, like many others, Cyril also conflated Paul’s doctrine of adoption with John’s doctrine of the new birth (*Catechetical Lectures* [NPNF² 7:47]). Note that at this point Cyril seems to anticipate an Arminian view of saving faith, saying that “adoption is in our own power, as John saith, ‘But as many as received Him, to them He gave power to become the children of God, even to them that believe in His name’” (*ibid.*).

Christ's unique sonship (i.e., his divine essence)—nevertheless, Gregory sees the indwelling of the Spirit as intrinsic to adoption. Furthermore, the reality of our sonship both entails growth in Christlikeness (*On the Baptism of Christ* [NPNF² 5:524]) and draws the vehemence of Satan more intensely towards us (ibid., 524).

John Chrysostom (347–407) in his *Instructions to Catechumens* (NPNF¹ 9:165) names adoption in a list of blessings which may be received—by faith—from God.⁶⁸ Again, in *Homilies on Matthew* (NPNF¹ 10:2, 71, 134), adoption features as one of many salvific blessings secured by Christ. Occasionally, though, adoption appears to function as a catch-all term for the blessings of salvation (ibid., 78; cf. *On the Acts of the Apostles* [NPNF¹ 11:152]), and sometimes it denotes the apex of those blessings, as it is through “adoption and brotherhood with the Only-Begotten” (ibid., 107) that believers enjoy their inheritance in glory (cf. *Homilies on Second Corinthians* [NPNF¹ 12:332]; *Commentary on Galatians* [NPNF¹ 13:52]). Though not as frequently as do Irenaeus and Augustine, Chrysostom also recognises the achievement of adoptive sonship as the goal of Christ's incarnation. He writes explicitly in *Homilies on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* that “this then is why he did all that He has done; ... that we might receive the adoption of sons, that we might love Him ... as a Father” (NPNF¹ 11:407; cf. *Commentary on Galatians* [NPNF¹ 13:30]). Furthermore, when Chrysostom wants to especially emphasise the call to holiness in the life of the believer, it is the metaphor of adoption that he calls upon. For example, in his homilies on Romans he pairs “sanctification and adoption” and extols the happiness of him who “holds on in the adoption, and keeps an exact watch on his holiness” (NPNF¹ 11:342). As others before⁶⁹ and after⁷⁰ him, Chrysostom was careful to maintain a distinction between the Sonship of Christ—who is the Son by nature—and believers who, by grace, become sons through adoption (*Homilies on John and Hebrews* [NPNF¹ 14:11]).

A thorough analysis of the place of adoption in Augustine's (354–430) soteriology is an undertaking beyond the scope of this project. That said, even a sampling of his

68 Though it is not entirely clear, Chrysostom seems to imply that the apostle Paul adopted Timothy—presumably on the basis of such texts as 1 Cor 4:17; 1 Tim 1:2, 18; and 2 Tim 1:2; 2:1 (cf. *Concerning the Statues* [NPNF¹ 9:333–334]). There is, however, no evidence for this position, and Paul's references to Timothy as his “child” or “son” in these texts should instead be understood as expressions of father-like affection for his young disciple and missionary apprentice.

69 See our discussion on Augustine herein.

70 For example, Rufinus of Aquileia (c. 340–410) in *A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed* (NPNF² 3:546); Theodoret (393–458) in *The Ecclesiastical History of Theodoret* (NPNF² 3:37–38).

work is sufficient to demonstrate the importance of the doctrine in his thought. To begin with, it is to adoption that the Father has called his people—corporate and individual. This is what he sought us for, though we did not seek him, and this we have through the Father’s only begotten Son (*Confessions* [NPNF¹ 1:164]). That the Father would seek and effectually call so degenerate a race as man to the privilege of adoption highlights the grace of God (*City of God* [NPNF¹ 2:241]).

So pervasive is adoption in his writings that we may be justified in supposing that it was Augustine’s favoured metaphor of salvation. He hints at this himself in admitting that “the word adoption is of great importance in the system of our faith, as is seen from the apostolic writings” (*Reply to Faustus* [NPNF¹ 4:160]). Following this comment, he provides a brief survey of the Pauline texts and then explains that adoption is that act by which we who belong to the creation (i.e., we who are neither of his own substance nor begotten of him) are made “brothers of Christ” (*ibid.*).^{71,72} Christ, as only begotten Son, came to deal with sin, which hindered our adoption as sons. Thus sonship, not merely justification, was the goal of the incarnation (*Tractates on John* [NPNF¹ 7:17]). Thus far we may be justified in saying that adoption serves as Augustine’s grand summary of God’s salvific purposes towards his elect. Indeed, Augustine selects the metaphor of adoption to convey the fullness of the salvific accomplishment of the era of grace contra the era of the law (*City of God* [NPNF¹ 2:268, 436]).

With respect to the elect, Augustine interprets Jesus’s teachings concerning God’s relationship to them as Father (e.g., Matt 6:4, 6, 8, 9, 14, 18, 32) and the fact that an inheritance awaits them (e.g., Matt 5:5) through the lens of “the apostolic teaching [that] gives the name of adoption to that by which we are called to” these privileges (*Sermon on the Mount* [NPNF¹ 6:32]). Furthermore, Augustine claims, it is by adoption that believers become partakers of the divine nature (*Harmony of the Gospels* [NPNF¹ 6:104]).⁷³ In his defence of this position Augustine appears to conflate Paul’s doctrine

71 Though, by quoting John 1:12–13 in the same explanation, Augustine may be guilty of conflating adoption and new birth.

72 Augustine is careful to maintain Christ’s pre-eminence in this brotherhood of sons. This he does by stressing that he is the only begotten Son, whereas those he names as brothers are so by adoption (*On Faith and the Creed* [NPNF¹ 3:324, 326]).

73 Following in the footsteps of Irenaeus and Athanasius, argues Saito (2016, 13–15), Augustine sees adoption as closely entwined with the idea of participation in God. Saito reports four significant overlaps between participation and adoption in the soteriology of all three: (1) the

of adoption with John's concept of the new birth (cf. John 1:12–13; cf. *Tractates on John* [NPNF¹ 7:240]). Nevertheless, we note that in Augustine's thought adoption does more than merely grant legal status—it entails the actual experience of the life of sonship. In this vein Augustine makes an interesting connection between adoption and prayers of confession. He argues in a sermon that believers, by the Spirit of adoption, cry 'Abba! Father!' so that we may approach God as Father and pray 'Forgive us our debts' (*Sermon* [NPNF¹ 6:328]). Similarly, in another sermon Augustine holds up the believer's privileged status as an adopted brother of Christ as a truth to fortify against temptation to sin (*ibid.*, 439).

Indeed, adoption and holiness are tightly intertwined in Augustine's thought (*On the predestination of the Saints* [NPNF¹ 5:515–516]). It is because we have received the Spirit of adoption that we love what is lawful (i.e., that which pleases God) and do not merely fear the consequences of disobedience. Adoption entails the faith-filled obedience of love for the Father and replaces fearful obedience to a master (*On the Spirit and the Letter* [NPNF¹ 5:107–108]). Moreover, our final release from captivity to the law of sin is secured through the final adoption for which we wait (*On Marriage and Concupiscence* [NPNF¹ 5:277]; cf. *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* [NPNF¹ 5:383]).

Recognising the 'now and not yet' nature of adoption (*Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* [NPNF¹ 5:404]), Augustine argues that the consummation of adoption is that which will complete man's renewal (*Confessions* [NPNF¹ 1:194]). For adoption sums up "those things which we do not yet see or possess, but hold in faith and hope" (*Letters* [NPNF¹ 1:311]). Confidence in our final adoption enables us to endure suffering—even "pain of death for righteousness' sake endured" (*On Patience* [NPNF¹ 3:529]). Thus it is the hope of adoption that strengthens us for our pilgrimage in this world (*Letters* [NPNF¹ 1:304]).

While we remain in this world, though, waiting for our final adoption also causes groaning, as those who have the highest expectations of the next life—who are "fuller

incarnation is crucial to both adoption and participation; (2) participation in God (i.e., the relationship entailed in sonship) is the goal of salvation; (3) participation in God (i.e., adoptive sonship) motivates believers to holiness; (4) the ultimate realisation of sonship and relational participation in God will occur at the consummation.

of holy desire” (*Letters* [NPNF¹ 1:339])—will have tears and pain now precisely because of their anticipation of the full realisation of their adoption. Yet, while we suffer, we have access to the Father in prayer; all of which—not just the ‘Abba! Father!’ cry—is made possible because of our adoption (*On the Gift of Perseverance* [NPNF¹ 5:551]). Finally, though, we will have what we now wait for, as the consummation of our adoption is what Christ’s resurrection ultimately secures (*On the Trinity* [NPNF¹ 3:51]).

Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315–367) affirms the inherent divinity of the Son, “neither created not adopted” (*St. Hilary of Poitiers: Introduction* [NPNF² 9a:lxiv]; *On the Trinity* [NPNF² 9a:54, 71, 86, 105–106]) and that believers—once sons of wrath—have been made sons of God by adoption (*On the Trinity* [NPNF² 9a:221]). Ambrose (c. 340–397) hits all the same notes: Believers are made children of God by adoption, in distinction from Christ, who is Son by nature (*On the Holy Spirit* [NPNF² 10:157]); adoption is tied up together with the indwelling of the Spirit (*ibid.*, 144); adoption is to the purpose of our attaining to the image and likeness of God through Christ (*ibid.*, 103). He likewise fails to hold adoption and regeneration as distinct doctrines (*ibid.*, 122).

John Cassian (c. 360–435) uses adoption as a synonym for salvation *in toto* (*Conferences* [NPNF² 11:303]) and also highlights the dignity of our status as sons of God as incentive to shun the temptations of sin as we make our earthly pilgrimage (*ibid.*, 393). Cassian also argues that believers attain to varying “grades of perfection,” as not all have the same virtue or fervour (*ibid.*, 420). While we would agree that believers attain varying grades of sanctification in this life, that does not appear to be Cassian’s meaning. Rather, he seems to imply that “ranks ... of perfection” are appointed by God such that some will attain to faithful servanthood, others to the higher privilege of friendship with God, and others to the adoption of sons (*ibid.*, 420–421). While we cannot agree with Cassian in reserving the status of sonship for some kind of pre-ordained spiritual elite, it is nevertheless noteworthy that it is the status of adoptive sonship that has highest rank in his schema.

Theodoret (393–458) recognises the intertwining of the coming of the Spirit and the achievement of adoption (*Dialogues: The “Eranistes” ... of the Blessed Theodoretus* [NPNF² 3:204]). Pope Leo I (c. 400–461) refers to the church as “the people of God’s adoption” (*Sermons* [NPNF² 12:116, 137–138]) and makes adoption both the ground

of confidence in prayer (*ibid.*, 131) and the enabling power of holiness (*ibid.*, 138, 140). John of Damascus (c. 675–750) seems to say that adoption is conferred through baptism, though it is not clear whether he uses baptism as a synonym for union with Christ or means the act of water immersion (*Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* [NPNF² 9b:77]). What is clear is that he believes adoption is by grace and that it is for the purpose that we who bear the fallen image of Adam may be renewed in the likeness of Christ, the True Son (*Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* [NPNF² 9b:82]).

3.2.3 The doctrine of adoption in the patristic era: A summary of key emphases

It is clear from our survey that the idea of salvation as the accomplishment of sonship by adoption was pervasive in the patristic era. Though more could be said, some emphases seem especially prevalent.

First, from very early in post-apostolic theology, the metaphor of adoption seems to have functioned as a virtual synonym for salvation *in toto*. In fact, this is evident as early as the apostolic era itself (e.g., in liturgies attributed to the apostle James [ANF 7:550] and the evangelist Mark [ANF 7:560]). We have already noted examples of this theme both pre- and post-Nicaea and will not repeat; suffice to say that, so close to the apostle Paul and in keeping with his own use of the metaphor in his letters, it is no surprise to find the eminent theologians of the time using adoption in this summative manner.

Second, adoption was frequently understood as the chief fulfilment of redemptive history. This emphasis is seen in three ways: first, in the sense that the era of the law is contrasted with the accomplishment of adoption; second, in the sense that the incarnation of Christ was to that purpose; and third, in the sense that adoption seems to be the preferred metaphor to convey both the privilege of participation in the relational life of the Trinity and all that ultimately awaits the believer in glory.

Third, though the church fathers were careful to distinguish between the ‘by nature’ Sonship of Christ and the ‘by grace’ sonship of adoption, they were zealous that the status of sonship be accompanied by increasing conformity to the likeness of Christ the true Son. Again, we see this emphasis as consistent with Paul’s own usage of the metaphor and as evidence that the fathers understood growth in Christlikeness as inherent to salvation.

Fourth, they were mindful of their dependence on the Spirit both to effect this conformity and to enable them to enjoy their filial relationship to the Father—even though, at times, this latter privilege seems to have taken on mystical dimensions foreign to Paul’s intentions in his letters.

Related to the above, it is clear that the fathers understood adoption as an enterprise of the whole Trinity and as a soteriological lens through which to view God himself. Clement’s emphasis on the affections of the Father for the adopted, as one example of many, evidences this (cf. *Paedagogus* [ANF 2:214]). Correspondingly, Basil of Caesarea and John Chrysostom are examples of those who see the believer’s love and affection for God primarily as the love of son to Father. It was likewise clear to the fathers that it is by the work of Christ, the Son, that the adoption of the Father’s elect is secured, and (discounting those whose writings are so mystical that they are hard to pin down to specific claims or arguments) that it is by the ministry of the Spirit that the benefit secured by the Son is applied to the hearts of the elect, and that they are increasingly conformed to his likeness.

In sum we may say of the patristic era that the use of the metaphor of adoption was both widespread and, fairly consistently and faithfully Pauline. The pervasiveness of adoption in soteriological reflection, liturgical and catechetical materials, and both devotional and doctrinal works appears to have nurtured a highly relational understanding of Christianity and one in which transformation was inherent. We shall see whether or not these characteristics endured through the medieval period.

3.3 *The medieval period*

3.3.1 The general neglect of the doctrine during the medieval period

Garner (2002, 3–6; 2016, 22), Ferguson (2017, 579–580), and Trumper (2002a, 17; 2002b, 179–180) all recognise the substantial neglect of the doctrine of adoption in the medieval period. Garner says the doctrine appears “sporadically” in the works of some of the church fathers but thereafter “remained essentially hidden until it surfaced again at the pens of certain Reformers” (Garner 2016, 22). Trumper attributes this to, among other things, the church’s pre-occupation with Trinitarian and Christological

disputes, whereas soteriology, he argues, came into focus (with the exception of Anselm, c. 1033–1109) only in the Reformation era (Trumper 2002b, 179–181).

Our own survey largely bears this out. Sheppard's (2005) survey of medieval theology, for example, contains not a single reference to either adoption or sonship. Brown and Flores's *A to Z of Medieval Philosophy and Theology* (2010) has no entry for adoption. Berkhof's *History of Christian Doctrines* (1969) likewise finds no place for adoption between the patristic and Reformation eras, and a survey of Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom* (1878) yields no results. Yet general neglect does not equal complete absence, and we do find some treatment of adoption in the works of both Anselm and Aquinas.

3.3.2 St. Anselm of Canterbury (1093–1109)

McGrath recognises Anselm as one of the three most important theologians of the medieval period—the others being Aquinas and Scotus (1998, 113). Anselm mentions adoption only twice, both instances in his *Book of Meditations and Prayers*, and both giving the impression that the metaphor is used to denote the highest benefit of salvation. For example, in lamenting the reality of indwelling sin, Anselm confesses:

I am the maddest of all madmen, who, created by Thee out of nothing, chosen out of the mass of sin and perdition to be a child of Thy grace, adopted by Thee to be a joint-heir of Thy dearest and only-begotten Son Jesus Christ our Lord and God, ... yet forgot all this Thy lavish bounty, even though [I] saw full well that these so great blessings had been given [me] by Thee. Yes, indeed, I have spurned the honours of Thy heavenly kingdom, disdained Thy glory, and reduced myself to the condition of a bastard and degenerate child, and given myself over to the devil (Anselm 1872, 85).

Here Anselm encapsulates all the privileges of salvation within adoption and contrasts the privileges of “a child of [God's] grace” with behaviour befitting “a bastard and degenerate child.” Though the metaphor of adoption does not appear in Anselm's *Major Works*, the concept of sonship is present in his contrasting the wretchedness of his natural condition as “one of the sons of Eve” (1939, 5) with the joy and blessedness of those called “sons of God ... and joint-heirs with Christ” (ibid., 31). It remains true,

though, that while we do find some reference to adoption and related ideas in Anselm, these references are very few in what is a considerable body of work. Furthermore, it is telling that these references appear in a *devotional*, and not a *doctrinal*, work. We shall find a little more in Aquinas.

3.3.3 St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

In Aquinas's *Treatise on the Incarnation* he expounds several aspects of the doctrine of adoption. First, Aquinas (1912–1936, 3.23.a1.ad1) highlights adoption as a gift of God's grace. Second, he argues that the inheritance to which God adopts man is, in essence, the enjoyment of God himself:

A man adopts someone as his son forasmuch as out of goodness he admits him as heir to his estate. Now God is infinitely good: for which reason He admits His creatures to a participation of good things; especially rational creatures, who forasmuch as they are made to the image of God, are capable of Divine beatitude. And this consists in the enjoyment of God, by which also God Himself is happy and rich in Himself—that is, in the enjoyment of Himself. Now a man's inheritance is that which makes him rich. Wherefore, inasmuch as God, of His goodness, admits men to the inheritance of beatitude, He is said to adopt them (Aquinas 1912–1936, 3.23.a1.resp).

Though Aquinas does not say it, we would argue that the enjoyment of God himself is the highest privilege of salvation, and thus, by identifying this privilege as a benefit of adoption, Aquinas appears to make adoption the apex of salvific accomplishment. Moreover, by locating his discussion of adoption within his treatise on the incarnation, and adoption being the only soteriological descriptor in the treatise, Aquinas appears to recognise the accomplishment of adoption as the goal of Christ's incarnation.

Aquinas's bringing of the image of God in man into his discussion of adoption is important. His argument in the extract above is that it is this image of God in man that fits man to enjoyment of the ultimate good, namely God himself. Aquinas makes use of the closely related concept of *likeness* (cf. "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" Gen 1:26) to argue that "by the work of adoption the likeness of natural sonship is communicated to men, according to Rom 8:29: Whom He foreknew ... to

be made conformable to the image of his Son” (Aquinas 1912–1936, 3.23.a1.ad2). In other words, it is by adoption that men are made heirs of the greatest possible inheritance (i.e., the enjoyment of God himself) and that they are conformed to the likeness of God’s natural Son (i.e., Christ).⁷⁴

Finally, we note that Aquinas understood adoption as a Trinitarian accomplishment. To quote: “Therefore adoption, though common to the whole Trinity, is appropriated to the Father as its author; to the Son, as its exemplar; to the Holy Ghost, as imprinting on us the likeness of this exemplar” (Aquinas 1912–1936, 3.23.a2.ad3). It is noteworthy both that Aquinas ascribes pre-eminence in adoption to the Father and that, in describing the Son as “exemplar” and the Spirit as imprinting on the adopted the likeness of the exemplar (i.e., of Christ), Aquinas not only recognises that spiritual formation is inherent to adoption but also goes so far as to make that formation the chief end of it.

3.3.4 The doctrine of adoption in the medieval period: A summary of key emphases

Though we have been able to find some treatment of adoption in the medieval period, the fact that we could locate only the two above seems to validate the claim that adoption all but disappeared from the consciousness of the church for almost a millennium. Nevertheless, even in such little material as there is, we note the following emphases.

First, though this must be inferred more than directly extracted from the writings of the period, adoption embraces all of redemptive history in that it originates in the Father’s predestining and culminates in enjoying a relationship with the Father as the substance of the inheritance of those made heirs by adoption. Second, it is reasonable to infer from both Anselm and Aquinas that they understood adoption to sonship as the highest privilege of salvation—though neither says so explicitly. Third, adoption is seen as the goal of the incarnation, and conformity to the likeness of Christ as the chief ministry of the Spirit in the lives of the adopted. Finally, adoption is a salvific lens

⁷⁴ Aquinas (1912–1936, 1.41.a3.resp) remained careful to distinguish between the natural Sonship of Christ and the sonship of those predestined to adoption.

through which we may view both the unity of the Trinity and the distinction of roles in its accomplishment.

Even so, and though it is beyond the scope of this project to examine this claim in detail, even a limited engagement with the writings of the time leaves the impression that Trumper is right in saying that “western interest in the Fatherhood of God waned as the sovereignty of God came to dominate [medieval] dogmatic interest” (2002a, 17). In Trumper’s view, Western soteriology had, by the time of the Reformation, become “thoroughly juridical” as the forensic face of the gospel almost completely eclipsed the familial (ibid., 17–18). Thus, though it may be said that such limited use of the doctrine as there was in this period was in no way unfaithful to its Pauline roots, sadly its use appears to have been so limited that those aspects both of the character of God and of the nature of salvation that were so well nurtured by it in the patristic era all but vanished from the consciousness of the church. Against this background we come now to the Reformation period.

3.4 *The Reformation*

Trumper (2002a) chronicles the treatment of the doctrine of adoption in the history of the church generally, and Saito (2016) zooms in on the Reformation period specifically. Trumper (2002a, 20) names Calvin as the pre-eminent exponent of the doctrine and, though Saito’s focus is on the confessions—rather than the theologians—of the Reformation period, by using Calvin’s treatment of adoption as the lens through which he analyses the confessions, he nevertheless credits Calvin as “the centre for exploring” (Saito 2016, 60) the doctrine.

3.4.1 John Calvin (1509–1564)

Lidgett (1902, 257) posits Calvin as the most important expositor of the doctrine of adoption since Irenaeus. For Calvin adoption was of more than merely academic interest though. Indeed, “the spiritual content of the evangelical life is for Calvin to be found in God’s Fatherhood and man’s sonship” (ibid). Against this claim it may be objected that, while Calvin’s *Institutes* contains chapters dedicated to regeneration (1960, 3.3) and justification (3.11–14, 16), there is no chapter dedicated to the doctrine of adoption. Ferguson rightly answers this objection by saying that Calvin “does not

treat sonship as a separate locus of theology precisely because it is a concept which undergirds everything he writes” (Ferguson 2017, 580). Though a comprehensive analysis of the place of adoption in Calvin’s theology is beyond the scope of this study,⁷⁵ a survey encompassing its centrality to his understanding of redemptive history and the administration of God’s covenant, soteriology, the Trinitarian nature of its accomplishment, and its importance for pastoral ministry shall suffice in defence of Lidgett’s and Ferguson’s claims.

Beginning with redemptive history, no discussion of Calvin’s theology will be on sound footing unless it recognises the fundamental importance of the Fatherhood of God in his thought. The reader has barely opened the *Institutes* before being told that the “pious mind does not dream up for itself any god it pleases, but contemplates the one and only true God ... as he manifests himself” (Calvin 1960, 1.2.2). What exactly is that self-manifestation? Calvin answers: He is “Lord and *Father*” (ibid., emphasis added). Calvin’s claim is not that all men recognise the Fatherhood of God, but that it is objectively fundamental to a right knowledge of him (cf. 2.6.1; 3.6.3).

That being so, no right understanding of God’s purposes towards mankind is possible apart from the notion of sonship. Calvin (1960, 1.14.2) recognises the fatherly care of God over all mankind and a corresponding “constituted” sonship—by virtue of Adam’s creation in the image of God (2.12.6)—as inherent to mankind (2.14.5).⁷⁶ However, though Calvin sees all men as “sons [of God] in general” (Calvin 2010a, 2:170), their knowledge and experience of God as Father was lost in the “ruin of mankind” (Calvin 1960, 1.2.1). This constituted sonship—the image of God in man now corrupted to “frightful deformity” (1.15.4)—is exactly what is restored through Christ the Second Adam (ibid.). Only those, however, who embrace Christ’s work on the cross enter a right relationship with God—specifically as their Father—from whom they were previously estranged (2.6.1). Ultimately for Calvin the long arc of redemptive history reaches its consummation in terms of sonship. Referring to “that day [when we will]

75 See Trumper’s 2001 dissertation, “An historical study of the doctrine of adoption in the Calvinistic tradition,” for a comprehensive treatment of the topic.

76 Furthermore, the fact that “every family in heaven and on earth” is named with reference to “the Father” (Eph 3:15) requires that there is some sense in which God’s Fatherhood and man’s sonship are universal (Trumper 2001, 80).

behold [his glory] face to face” (3.25.10), Calvin expounds the joy of God’s children in terms of their complete restoration to the likeness of their Father.⁷⁷

Within this long arc of redemptive history, Calvin sees God’s covenant as the temporal administration by which restoration to sonship is given effect. Speaking of the Jews under the Old Covenant, Calvin writes that “they were *adopted* into the hope of immortality; and assurance of this *adoption* was certified to them by the oracles, by the law, and by the prophets” (Calvin 1960, 2.10.2, emphasis added). Our own analysis of the Old Testament found no clear evidence to support the idea of Israel’s adoption, but ample evidence that Israel’s sonship was central to its identity. Nevertheless, Calvin sees adoption to sonship as so central to the Old Covenant that he names it “the covenant of adoption” (3.2.22). Indeed, Calvin couples covenant to adoption—and makes it the controlling salvific accomplishment towards which redemptive history moves—as early as Abraham. It is via the unfolding of the “special covenant” with Abraham that “adoption as sons” is received by those who were once enemies of God (1.10.1). But for Calvin the Old and the New Covenants are essentially the same and differ only in formalities (cf. 2.10.1, 2). Thus, “the covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same” (ibid).⁷⁸ It is no surprise, then, that Calvin unpacks the salvific realisation of the New Covenant in terms of adoption (cf. Calvin’s citations of Gal 4 and Rom 8:15 in 2.11.9), mature sonship (2.11.5), and inheritance (2.11.2).⁷⁹ Nor is it a surprise that he sees the ultimate triumph of saving grace also in terms of adoption: “He will make our vile body conformable to his glorious body ... the final end of our adoption is, that what has in order preceded in Christ, shall at length be completed in us” (Calvin 2010b, 205).

77 Calvin cites 1 John 3:2 in combination with 1 Cor 13:12 to establish this point. The fact that he employs a Johannine text (together with a Pauline) does not alter the fact that it is in terms of the Fatherhood of God and the sonship of his elect that the narrative of redemptive history finds its fulfilment.

78 This is not to say that Calvin conflates the Old and New into one single covenant. Indeed, whereas he details similarities between the two in *Institutes* 2.10, he likewise unpacks differences in *Institutes* 2.11. The point, rather, is that the two covenants share one aim and are thus essentially expressive of one will, namely God’s. They differ only “in the mode of dispensation” (Calvin 1960, 2.10.2).

79 See also Calvin’s comments on the fulfilment of the salvific intentions of the Old Covenant in adoptive sonship in the New in his commentaries on the relevant passages in Galatians (e.g., 3:23–4:5 in Calvin 2010e, 106–120) and Romans 8:15–29 (e.g., in Calvin 2010f, 295–319).

And what is, for Calvin, the ultimate goal of our transformation? Calvin explains that both the saved and damned will see Christ in his transplendent glory. For the wicked this will be an occasion for dread and terror, but the adopted will “see him as a friend” (Calvin 2010b, 205). God declared to Moses that no man could see him and live; instead, he would be consumed like stubble in a fire because of the sinfulness of our flesh. But the consummation of our adoption is the renewal of the image of God in us, which means that we shall at last “have eyes prepared to see God” (ibid., 206). It is worth noting at this point that Calvin substantially echoes Irenaeus and Augustine in seeing the ultimate goal of adoption as experiential participation in the relational life of the Trinity—namely, to see God truly and thus to know and love him duly. This is a profound insight with important implications for Christian spiritual formation, and to it we shall return in Chapter 5.

Turning our attention from redemptive history to soteriology, Wilterdink (1976, 19) asserts that “for Calvin, adoption into the family of God is synonymous with salvation.” This was certainly true of many in the patristic period, but is it an overstatement in respect of Calvin’s soteriology? It seems not, as Calvin himself says that “gratuitous adoption [is that] in which our salvation consists” (Calvin 2010f, 318).⁸⁰ We understand Calvin’s claim when we understand how he saw the relationships between adoption and the related soteriological ideas of election and justification.

As to the former, and citing Paul’s teaching that we were chosen in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4), Calvin explains that we were “*adopted* in Christ into the eternal inheritance” (1960, 3.22.1, emphasis added) and, in so doing, seems to make election and adoption synonymous (cf. 3.22.7; 3.24.4, 5). Similarly, Calvin appears to make adoption and foreknowledge synonymous when he says that “the foreknowledge of God ... is not a bare prescience ..., but the adoption by which he had always distinguished his children from the reprobate” (Calvin 2010f, 317). While Calvin is right to identify a strong relationship between election and adoption, he goes too far in making them one and the same. First, Paul teaches that believers were

80 See also, for example, Calvin’s identification of “the grace of adoption” as the means by which sinners are rescued from “the pit of perdition” (Calvin 1960, 3.17.5). Similarly, it is by “adoption alone” that man—otherwise estranged from God—is “transported from death to life” (3.18.3). Though quotes could be piled up, just one more will suffice: “The gospel ... is embraced in our adoption and the effecting of our salvation” (3.25.3).

“predestined ... for adoption” (Eph 1:5) according to God’s election “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4)—not that they were actually adopted pre-temporally. Adoption is, therefore, the result of election—not merely a synonym for it. Moreover, Calvin’s construction seems inconsistent with the nature of adoption itself, which requires the transfer of the adoptee from the *potestas* of one *paterfamilias* to another—not merely the intention to do so (Olliffe 2021, under “Assessment: Adoption and Predestination”).

As to the latter, Westhead (1995, 112) says that Calvin mixes soteriological metaphors to such an extent as to create the impression “that adoption and justification would hardly be separable in his mind.” It is difficult to see how Westhead reaches this conclusion though, as Calvin’s (1960, 3.11.4) comments on Ephesians 1:5–6 show that he regards adoption as the result of justification. Similarly, Trumper (2001, 137) says that “in writing of adoption Calvin must have had justification in view, because adoption immediately implies acceptance.” This statement is difficult to defend. Trumper does take cognisance of the distinction between the realm of the court and that of the family (cf. Trumper 2001, 130–138)—though perhaps not sufficiently so. He says that for Calvin “the meaning of acceptance is not exhausted by the sinner’s reconciliation to an angry judge. It culminates in the receiving of the sinner by his loving heavenly Father” (Trumper 2001, 136). But Trumper surely errs in the nature of the relationship he implies between judge and accused. He assumes that their relationship needs to be—and is capable of being—reconciled. But this is not the case; after acquittal the relationship between the parties remains the same: the judge remains an officer of the court, and the acquitted remains a citizen subject to the laws of the land. No reconciliation is necessary, as their relationship has not altered in any way. Pre-, during, and post-trial, their relationship remains one determined with reference to the law. This is consistent with Paul’s usage of justification—which has to do with legal acquittal (*NIDNTTE*, 1:733–736)—and in that context the acceptance implied in justification carries strictly forensic connotations. The metaphor of adoption transports the relationship into an entirely different realm. Thus, while we agree with Trumper’s claim that adoption represents the “climactic element” in Calvin’s soteriology (2001, 136), we cannot agree with his further claim that Calvin subsumed adoption under justification (*ibid.*, 137). In sum, though Calvin’s understanding of the relationship between adoption and election appears to have been wide of the mark, and his

understanding of the relationship between adoption and justification is not clearly set out (thus leaving him vulnerable to the charge of subsuming one within the other), what is clear is that the language of adoption features prominently in his soteriology, such that the impression is created that it is the controlling framework thereof.

At a distance of some 500 years, many have become accustomed to thinking of Calvin only as a great theologian, but it must be remembered that, much as he was a systematician, he was also a pastor. Clark (2008, 108) explains that Calvin's agenda was not merely to explain difficult doctrines such as election but to apply them to believers' hearts for their own assurance—and it is the metaphor of adoption that supplied him with the conceptual framework and language to that end. Calvin writes, for example, that believers shall never have the certainty of assurance that they ought to have until they “come to know his *eternal election* ... [by which] he does not indiscriminately *adopt* all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others” (1960, 3.21.1, emphasis added). Calvin presses home the implications, not only of the Father's eternal election but also of the Spirit's ministry for the assurance of believers, in the language of adoption: “When [the Spirit] is our guide and teacher, our spirit is made *assured of the adoption* of God” (Calvin 2010f, 299, emphasis added. Cf. 1960, 3.2.11). Similarly, Calvin employed the metaphor of adoption to exhort believers to sanctification. Calvin's teaching that a manifested “harmony ... between God's righteousness and their obedience ... [confirms] the adoption that they have received as sons” (1960, 3.6.1.; cf. 3.6.3) evidences that, in his thought, sanctification and assurance were closely intertwined.

When we remember that for Calvin adoption and salvation are virtual synonyms, we understand that they cannot be separated. Indeed, as it is “no common honour that we are reckoned among the sons of God” (Calvin 2010c, 2:262) so it is our duty to be “seen to be his *sons and daughters*” (ibid., emphasis original). In a sermon on Ephesians 1:4–6, Calvin argues that “we must not put things asunder which he has coupled together” (Calvin 1973, 35), by which he means that election to adoption is the root that must yield the fruit of holiness. Further revealing his pastoral heart, Calvin again calls adoption into service to stress what, in his thought, was a crucial aspect of sanctification, namely that obedience is offered not as by servants under the bonds of law, but as by “*sons* ... trusting that their obedience, ... [though incomplete, half-done,

and even defective] ..., will be accepted, ... [even] approved by [their] most merciful *Father*" (1960, 3.19.5, emphasis added).

Adoption also, for Calvin, revealed the conjoint ministries of the three persons of the Trinity in its accomplishment. We have already noted the strong relationship between adoption and election in Calvin's thought, and now we note further that it is specifically "the Heavenly Father" who elects according to his own pleasure (1960, 3.22.1). It is by the Father's "free benevolence" that he becomes Father to us (3.1.3). Though for Calvin there is a sense in which all men and angels are constituted sons of God by creation,⁸¹ it is simultaneously true that "to neither angels nor men was God ever Father" (2.14.5). It is only by "free adoption" that men are brought into relationship with God as Father (ibid.). Thus, in the economy of adoption, Calvin understood election as the particular privilege of the Father with respect to believers, and the Father's own freedom in that election as determinative.

For Calvin (1960, 2.7.15), the particular role of the Son in the accomplishment of adoption is understood within the covenantal framework we have already noted. Christ released sinners from the bonds of the law to adoptive sonship. But this experiential knowledge of God as Father is possible only through the mediatorial work of the Son on the cross (2.6.1). The accomplishment of adoptive sonship was so central to Calvin's understanding of the redemptive purposes of the Godhead that he says, "the Son of God, to whom [the inheritance of the Heavenly Kingdom] wholly belongs, has adopted us as his brothers" (2.12.2). This was the goal of the Son's incarnation and explains the necessity of it. For Calvin, our confidence that we are truly sons of God through adoption rests on the fact of the incarnation as "God's natural Son fashioned for himself a body from our body, flesh from our flesh, bones from our bones, that he might be one with us... He took our nature upon himself to impart to us what was his, and to become both Son of God and Son of man in common with us" (2.12.2; cf. 3.20.36). But the fact of the incarnation, though necessary, is not sufficient unto adoption. Union with Christ, by whom the "wonderful exchange" (4.17.2) is effected, distinguishes adopted sons from those who remain estranged from God and are children of wrath (2.6.1), and it is by faith alone that the children of God are "engraft[ed] ... spiritually into the body of Christ" (2.13.2; cf. 3.15.6; Calvin 2010e, 110). Thus, it is

81 See also Calvin's comments on Exod 4:22 (Calvin 2010d, 1:103).

the Son whose coming marks the transition from Old Covenant to New, in which the preparatory ministry of the law is fulfilled in the accomplishment of sonship by adoption. Moreover, it is by faith in the atonement made by the Son on the cross that those formerly at enmity with God become sons and co-heirs of his kingdom inheritance.

In a section headed “Titles of the Holy Spirit in Scripture” in his *Institutes*, Calvin gives first place to “the Spirit of adoption” (1960, 3.1.3). Calvin grounds the pre-eminence of this title on the fact that the Spirit of adoption witnesses to the “free benevolence of God with which God the Father has embraced us in his beloved only-begotten Son to become a Father to us” (ibid.). Recalling from our earlier discussion that for Calvin accurate knowledge of God begins with the understanding of his Fatherhood (cf. 1.2.2; 2.6.1; 3.6.3), we are not surprised that the witness of the Spirit to that fact comes first in his thought. Likewise, it is no surprise that Calvin couples the Spirit’s witness to the Fatherhood of God with his ministry of assurance to the adopted that they may have experiential confidence in God specifically as Father (3.1.3). Thus the ministry of the Spirit in relation to the adoption of God’s children is to bear witness to the Fatherhood of God and to create, in the adopted, filial confidence in the Father’s paternal care of them.

Recalling our earlier observation that for Calvin all theological truth must—if it wishes to stand on solid ground—begin with the Fatherhood of God (cf. Calvin 1960, 1.2.2; 2.6.1; 3.6.3), it is no surprise that the cognate themes of sonship and adoption suffuse his theology. We have seen that the realisation of adoptive sonship gives shape to Calvin’s understanding of the long arc of redemptive history, and that it both binds the covenants together in one sense and distinguishes them in another. We have seen, additionally, that a case could be made that adoption is the centre of gravity of Calvin’s soteriology in which related doctrines such as election and justification converge. Furthermore, it was in the language of adoption and sonship that Calvin’s pastoral care for believers was expressed as he sought to assure them of their salvation and to exhort them to holiness. Finally, we noted that Calvin understood adoption as an accomplishment that revealed both the united purposes and the distinct actions of the persons of the Trinity.

It remains only to note the substantial continuity of some of the key emphases of earlier writers in Calvin's treatment of adoption. For both Calvin and the patristic fathers, adoption is often synonymous with salvation. For both, the accomplishment of sonship by adoption is the chief blessing of the covenant and the pathway along which the whole of redemptive history moves. For both, adoption to sonship entails growing conformity to the likeness of Christ and the actual experience and enjoyment of a filial relationship to the Father. For both, adoption is the soteriological metaphor that most comprehensively reveals the persons of the Trinity willing and acting in concert to the accomplishment of salvation. Much as there is an evident continuity, though, it is likewise clear that Calvin advanced the church's understanding of the doctrine of adoption considerably.

Treatment of adoption in the medieval period was so sparse that it borders on meaningless to evaluate continuities and/or discontinuities of the writings of that time with Calvin. What is considerably more important to note is Calvin's service in recovering and furthering both the church's understanding of God as Father and the familial face of the gospel that sees the elect as sons in relationship in Christ and by the Spirit to the Father. Divine grace was, for Calvin, not the impersonal quality it often was in medieval theology, but God's personal involvement in the salvation of sinners (Jones 2000, 566). Though five centuries have elapsed since the time of his ministry, Calvin's treatment of the doctrine of adoption remains unsurpassed. He does not answer every question theologians of other eras would ask (e.g., How does adoption fit in the *ordo salutis*?)—even so his treatment is both thorough and faithful to Pauline usage.

3.4.2 Post-Calvin Reformation Era and Reformed Scholasticism

John Knox (c. 1515–1572), a disciple of Calvin's in Geneva for some years, certainly caught some of his teacher's spirit. It seems that for Knox, as for Calvin, adoption stood for salvation *in toto*. In his *Answer to the Cavillations of an Adversary Respecting the Doctrine of Predestination*, for example, Knox says that by an eternal and immutable decree:

God ... hath once determined with himself what He will have to be done with every man ... [and] ... he hath decreed to call those whom

he hath loved in Christ to the knowledge of himself and of his Son Christ Jesus, that they may be assured of their adoption by the justification of faith which, working in them by charity, maketh their works to shine before men to the glory of their Father so that they, made conformed to the image of the Son of God, may finally receive that glory which is prepared for the vessels of mercy (1854, 5:36).

To say nothing of the rest of his writings, even in *On Predestination* alone Knox clearly displays the same theological emphases as Calvin.⁸² The above extract is sufficient, however, to evidence Knox's use of adoption as representative of salvation as a whole, including the protological-to-eschatological framework thereof, as well as his conviction that conformity to the image of Christ is inherent to that adoption. Regrettably, however, it was not long, according to Trumper (2002a, 21), before the familial face of Calvin's theology was lost.

Muller's (2003) *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, for example, contains only sporadic references to adoption.⁸³ Most of these simply use adoption as a synonym for salvation; a few are worth mention though. Bullinger (1504–1575) uses adoption as the salvific accomplishment by which all that was lost in Adam's fall is restored to the sons and heirs of God (Muller 2003, 2:189). Olevian (1526–1587) identifies the "substance of the covenant" as the promise and gift of adoption as sons and heirs of God in Christ (Muller 2003, 2:216). Ursinus (1534–1583), in his lectures on the Heidelberg Catechism, argues that adoption is the lens through which we properly understand the character of God (Muller 2003, 4:247). Commendable though these uses of the doctrine are, they are too few to mount any challenge to Trumper's assessment of the period.

Though the roots of Reformed Scholasticism are often traced to some of Calvin's contemporaries and immediate successors—namely Vermigli (1499–1562), Zanchius (1516–1590), and Beza (1519–1605)—Daniel (2019, 68) considers Turretin's

82 See Knox's statements in *On Predestination (Works, vol. 5)* on the Fatherhood of God (1854, 5:27, 35, 50, 56, 82, 130, 204–205, 231, 241, 254, 376–377, 394–395, 412); the children of God (21, 23, 28, 52, 58, 81, 87, 92, 96, 210, 235, 236, 237, 249, 250, 257, 273, 285, 301, 338, 340, 356, 376–377, 383, 394–395, 403, 414, 415, 417); sons of God (310, 413, 417, 418); adoption (26, 36, 38, 44, 169).

83 Muller 2003, 1:291, 296, 299; 2:189, 216, 292; 3:270, 457, 471, 509, 564; 4:247, 250–251, 287, 298, 331, 354, 368.

Institutes of Elenctic Theology as the high point of the movement. It is telling, then, that Turretin's only treatments of adoption in this voluminous work are to argue that it is subsumed within justification (Turretin 1992–1997, 2:656–659) and in a separate argument, which admittedly does strike many Pauline/Calvinist notes, to nevertheless conclude that:

It is ... to no purpose [that some] anxiously ask how justification and adoption differ from each other, and [whether one or the other precedes in the *ordo salutis*]. For since it is evident ... that justification is a benefit by which God (being reconciled to us in Christ) absolves us from the guilt of sins and gives us a right to life, it follows that adoption is included within justification itself as a part which, with the remission of sins, constitutes the whole of this benefit (*ibid.*, 2:668).

If the summative assessment of the doctrine of adoption in the most respected text of the period was that it was no more than a subsidiary element of justification, it is little wonder that it faded quickly into the background of Reformed soteriology. Though Daniel (2019, 67–68) sees some overlaps between Reformed Scholasticism and English Puritanism, the latter was nevertheless a distinct movement, to which we now turn our attention.

3.5 *The English Puritans*

Packer wrote of the Puritan treatment of the doctrine of adoption that “their teaching on the Christian life, so strong in other ways, was notably deficient here” (Packer 2004, 258). Beeke and Jones give a more measured assessment, saying that, though the Puritans did not treat adoption as thoroughly as they did related aspects of soteriology, they certainly did not neglect it; they proceed to list a small number who gave it “ample treatment” and a larger number who provided “some treatment” or at least preached on the topic (Beeke and Jones 2012, 691). Our own survey of the doctrine of adoption in the Puritan era will begin with a brief analysis of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) before focusing on William Perkins (in *Perkins' Works*), William Ames (in

Marrow of Sacred Divinity and Substance of the Christian Religion), and Thomas Watson (in *A Body of Divinity*).⁸⁴

3.5.1 The Westminster Confession

As best as current scholarship can tell, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) was the first confession in the history of the church to recognise—by devoting an entire chapter to it—the doctrine of adoption as a theological locus in its own right (Trumper 2001, 6).⁸⁵ Chapter 12 therein reads as follows:

Of Adoption

All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption;^(a) by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God;^(b) have His name put upon them;^(c) receive the Spirit of adoption;^(d) have access to the throne of grace with boldness;^(e) are enabled to cry, Abba, Father;^(f) are pitied,^(g) protected,^(h) provided for,⁽ⁱ⁾ and chastened by Him as by a Father;^(j) yet never cast off,^(k) but sealed to the day of redemption,^(l) and inherit the promises,^(m) as heirs of everlasting salvation.⁽ⁿ⁾

(a) Eph 1:5; Gal 4:4, 5. (b) Rom 8:17; John 1:12. (c) Jer 14:9; 2 Cor 6:18; Rev 3:12. (d) Rom 8:15. (e) Eph 3:12; Rom 5:2. (f) Gal 4:6. (g) Ps 103:13. (h) Prov 14:26. (i) Matt 6:30, 32; 1 Pet 5:7. (j) Heb 12:6. (k) Lam 3:31. (l) Eph 4:30. (m) Heb 6:12. (n) 1 Pet 1:3, 4; Heb 1:14.⁸⁶

84 These three are selected for specific focus as they are regarded as having given the most ample treatment to adoption in their extant written works (Beeke and Jones 2012, 691).

85 Saito provides detailed analyses of the role of adoption in eighteen important confessions of the period 1523–1647 and finds that, though many do touch upon adoption and/or evidence an appreciation of related themes, such as the Fatherhood of God, the sonship of believers, or the familial nature of salvation (as distinct from its juridical nature), the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is the first to include a dedicated treatment of the doctrine (2016, 257). Trumper provides a similar list (though without analysis) spanning the years 675–1883 remarking that the list is long because it includes confessions that contain “even the faintest allusions to the familial implications of the gospel” (Trumper 2001, 9–10).

86 Accessed at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-confession-faith> on 27 September 2021.

Having just noted the strength of the relationship between adoption and election in both the patristic fathers and Calvin, one cannot help but notice that *WCF* 12 fails to relate the two. Given the strength of this relationship in the relevant Scriptures, especially Ephesians 1:5, this omission is surprising. That said, Chapter 3 (“Of God’s Eternal Decree”) does explain that adoption is the result of God’s effectual call, predicated on his election (cf. *WCF* 3.6). Furthermore, the inclusion of Ephesians 1:5 as the reference text for the opening clause at least opens the possibility that the Westminster Divines meant to include the idea of election within the designation “in ... Jesus Christ.” With this in mind, then, we see that Westminster appreciated the redemptive-historical span of the metaphor: from pre-temporal election (i.e., “in ... Christ”) to consummation (i.e., “sealed to the day of redemption, ... as heirs of everlasting salvation”). Saito notes the balanced treatment of the forensic and familial aspects of adoption in *WCF* 12. The phrases “justified,” “liberties and privileges,” and “inherit the promises” reference the legal aspects of the relationship created by the act of adoption, whereas “have His name put upon them,” “have access to the throne,” “cry, Abba, Father,” and the following expressions of paternal care draw attention to the personal, familial nature of the relationship.

Trumper says that the structuring of the *WCF* “strongly suggests that the Westminster Assembly regarded adoption as the pinnacle of soteriology” (Trumper 2001, 235). That may be so, but it does lack in some respects. First, the chapter on adoption is very short—the shortest in *WCF*, in fact. For a doctrine that we have seen to bear profoundly upon so many other aspects of theology, its rather thin treatment in *WCF* 12 does seem out of proportion. Trumper (2001, 239) offers a plausible defence on this point, namely that adoption had not been the subject of any controversy—contra justification, for example. *WCF* 12 therefore had to refute no errors, and the depth and detail of, for example, *WCF* 11 (Justification) were simply unnecessary. A more substantive weakness of *WCF* 12 is that it does not appear to recognise the exclusively Pauline provenance of the metaphor of adoption. The chapter’s reference texts make the case: of the twenty-one Scriptures given, only nine are Pauline. As a result, some of the ideas present (or at least implied) in *WCF* 12, biblically and theologically sound though they may be, may not be true to Paul’s intentions. For example, *WCF* 12 refers to the adopted as “children” rather than as “sons” of God, whereas Paul refers only to “adoption as sons.”

As commendably inclusive as *WCF* 12 is at this point, our analysis of the Old Testament sonship motif and our knowledge of ancient Roman adoption practices lead us to believe that the phrase “adoption as sons” carries specific connotations that the more generic “children” does not. The great care with which the patristic writers distinguished the ‘by nature’ Sonship of Christ from the ‘by grace’ sonship of the adopted supports our conviction that the descriptor ‘son’ is not arbitrary and may not simply be swapped out for another word within the same semantic domain. Again, Trumper (2001, 239–240) notes that *WCF* 12 describes the adopted as “pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by [God] as by a Father.” True though all of that may be, not only are none of the reference texts passages in which Paul employs the metaphor of adoption—none of them are Pauline at all. Thus, and though this is not an accusation of error per se, *WCF* 12 is not quite as tightly tethered to its biblical foundations as we might like.

Though *WCF* 12 does not say everything we might want—following our study of the five Pauline passages—to say about adoption, its influence has nevertheless been significant. Ferguson notes: “perhaps more than anything else it is the presence of [*WCF* 12] which has kept alive within Presbyterianism (particularly in Scotland and the Southern Presbyterian Church in the USA) the significance of Sonship in the life of faith” (Ferguson 1986, 83).⁸⁷ Trumper rightly notes that the influence of *WCF* 12 has been aided by questions 34 and 74 respectively of the *Shorter* and *Larger Catechisms*, which ask, “What is Adoption?” The answers to both restate *WCF* 12 in language appropriate to catechesis. All that said, it must be remembered that the purpose of a confession is not to expound any single doctrine in full measure but rather to present a formal and orderly summary of the essential doctrines of the Christian faith in order to guide the teaching and practices of Christian churches (Kapic and Vander Lugt 2013, 36). With this in mind, the mere inclusion of a dedicated chapter in *WCF* indicates the importance of the doctrine in Puritan thought generally. To see how the doctrine was expounded and applied, we will take three notable figures of the Puritan era as examples.

87 Another indicator of the influence of *WCF* 12 is the fact that it is copied verbatim in the *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order* (1658) and the *London Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689).

3.5.2 William Perkins (1558–1602)

According to Beeke and Jones, William Perkins is often considered to be “the father of Puritanism” (2012, 691). It is said that as a preacher he made “his auditors’ hair stand up and hearts fall down” (Breward 2000, 551). His writings were very influential, being translated into Dutch, German, French, Czech, and Hungarian, making him “the first Elizabethan theologian with an international reputation” (ibid.). According to Breward, it was Perkins’s writing on predestination that prompted a refutation from Arminius and sparked one of the most important theological debates of the seventeenth century (ibid.). Furthermore, as a Fellow and tutor at Christ’s College, Cambridge, there can be no doubt that his influence on a generation of English clergymen was considerable (Kapic and Vander Lugt 2013, 86). Perkins addressed various aspects of adoption in his voluminous writings and is thus a suitable figure with whom to begin our analysis of the doctrine in the Puritan era.

The first point worth noting is where Perkins (1626, 1:81–83) locates his discussion on the doctrine of adoption, namely in a chapter dealing with justification. This requires some unpacking. In Chapter 15 of *A Golden Chaine*, in which he treats election and reprobation, Perkins defines election as “God’s decree, whereby on his owne⁸⁸ free will, he hath ordained certain men to salvation” (1626, 1:24). Perkins goes on to explain that the execution of the decree is the action by which God effectually works all those things that he decreed for the salvation of the elect. The execution consists of three parts: the foundation, the means, and the degrees. The foundation is Christ, in his office of mediator, such that all the elect are chosen in Christ. The means is God’s covenant (ibid., 31–32), in particular the Covenant of Grace (ibid., 70–71) and its seal (i.e., the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, ibid., 71–76). The degrees of executing the decree are twofold: God’s love, and the declaration of it (ibid., 76–77). God’s love is that by which God freely loves the elect in Christ, and his declaration of it differs with respect to elect infants on the one hand (ibid., 76–77) and to those of “yeares of discretion” (ibid., 77) on the other. To those in the latter category, the declaration of God’s love consists in four degrees: first, effectual calling (ibid., 77); second, justification (ibid., 81); third, sanctification (ibid., 83); and fourth, glorification

88 Perkins’s original Early Modern English spelling is retained in all quotations from his works.

(*ibid.*, 92). It is within this second degree of the declaration of God's love, namely justification, that Perkins locates the doctrine of adoption.

Thus we see that Perkins correctly, albeit indirectly, discerned a strong relationship between election (i.e., in Christ) and adoption.⁸⁹ At the same time he appears, incorrectly, to subsume adoption within justification. In his own words: "Justification hath annexed unto it Adoption, whereby all such as are predestinate to bee adopted, receive power, to be actually accounted the sonnes of God by Christ" (*ibid.*, 82). Precisely what he means by "annexed unto it" Perkins does not explain, but it appears from the location of adoption within his overall schema (i.e., the foundation, means, and degrees of the execution of election) to denote something subsidiary. Further, Perkins's language at this point strongly echoes John 1:12, which suggests that he might be guilty of conflating the Pauline concept of adoption with the Johannine concept of regeneration. Nevertheless, Perkins goes on to enumerate the privileges of the adopted and, in sum, these amount to the restitution, in Christ, of all that was lost in Adam—including the Father's paternal care in this life and participation in Christ's inheritance in the next (*ibid.*, 82–83).

Perkins is clear that adoption—along with all the benefits of salvation—may be enjoyed only by those "joined to Christ" (1626, 1:368). Interestingly, at this point in his writing he lists justification, adoption, and sanctification as distinct salvific benefits. Given our earlier observation that Perkins appeared to subsume adoption within justification—or at least to make it subsidiary—we wonder whether we may have misunderstood one or other of the instances in which he sets out the relationship between the two doctrines. At any rate we may say that it is not entirely clear how Perkins understood the relationship of justification to adoption—save that both are founded ultimately in God's free election in Christ.

What is clear is Perkins's understanding of the Spirit's ministry of assurance. It is the Spirit that "sealeth unto us our adoption, by begetting a special trust and confidence ... [and] doth make us ... to rest ourselves in [God's promises]" (1626, 1:104). Whereas in our own analysis we found the single-witness interpretation of the Spirit's

⁸⁹ Though he does make the relationship between election and adoption more explicit elsewhere, e.g., 1626, 1:104, 429–430.

ministry in Romans 8:16 more compelling, Perkins takes the joint-witness view. Nevertheless, even in Perkins's joint-witness interpretation, it is the Spirit's testimony, and not the believer's, that is decisive in granting assurance of one's election to sonship (*ibid.*, 429–430). Such Spirit-given assurance is, in Perkins's mind, absolutely essential to the Christian for, if Satan assailed Christ himself—attacking his confidence in the Father's paternal care of him and in his status as Son (Matt 4:1–11)—he will certainly do all he can to make Christians doubt their adoption (1626, 3:381–382).

Importantly, this Spirit-given assurance is not merely intellectual, but is an expression of the Father's love for his adopted for, knowing that “the testimonie of our own spirit is often feeble and weake, God of his goodnes hath given his owne spirit to bee a fellow witnes with our spirit” (Perkins 1626, 1:369). It is by this Spirit-given assurance that the adopted are persuaded not only that they are adopted and chosen in Christ, but also that they are certain “to enjoy eternall life in the kingdome of heaven” (*ibid.*). Perkins understood this ministry of the Spirit as bearing the same warmth of affection as the Father from whom he proceeds; he writes, “the Holy Ghost never departeth from our spirit, but dwelleth in us, abideth in us, speaketh in us, sheweth forth his power in us, prayeth in us” (*ibid.*, 430). Perkins's understanding of the unity of the Trinity in this ministry is further illustrated in his insistence that the fruit of the ministry of the Spirit must be a heartfelt confidence in the love of the Father: “It is certaine, that no man is renued by the Holy Ghost, which is not perswaded that God is his most mercifull and most loving Father: and therefore can call upon him as a Father” (*ibid.*, 430). Similarly, in explaining the Spirit's ministry of assurance in his commentary on Galatians 4:6, Perkins says that the Holy Spirit is called the “Spirit of the Sonne” because “he proceeds by communication of substance or godhead, not onely from the Father, but also from the Sonne” (1626, 2:277). While noting the unity of the persons of the Trinity, Perkins also notes the distinct actions of each in the accomplishment and application of adoption. The Father is “of none,” the Son is “of the Father,” and the Spirit is “of both; and hence it is that he is sent of both” (*ibid.*). Thus we see that adoption, for Perkins, provided a lens through which to ponder the inner life of the Trinity.

It is clear also that Perkins appreciated the eschatological dimension of adoption and its implications for believers in the present. The assurance of adoption in the hearts of

the elect, he wrote, fortifies them to “undergoe all crosses and afflictions with a quiet and contented mind; because they know that the time will come when they shall have full redemption from all evils” (1626, 1:370).

3.5.3 William Ames (1576–1633)

William Ames was Perkins’s “most distinguished disciple” (Breward 2000, 551). Ames was a prolific writer whose best-known work is *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, though his writings on topics such as covenant and polity were also very influential. His criticisms of the Church of England led to the banning of his books in England and his own exile to the Netherlands, where the influence of his teaching lasted into the eighteenth century (ibid.). Just as the *Westminster Confession of Faith* was the first confession in the history of the church to include a chapter dedicated to the doctrine of adoption, Ames’s *Marrow of Sacred Divinity* may have been the first systematic theology to do likewise.

We commence our study of Ames’s treatment of adoption with Chapter 28 of *Marrow*—entitled “Of Adoption.” Before we do, a preliminary observation is in order. The chapter consists of twenty-seven points, nineteen of which are supported by references to Scripture and eight of which are not. Of those nineteen, only six are supported solely by references to Pauline texts (only four of which are from the Pauline adoption passages specifically), four exclusively by Johannine, two exclusively from Hebrews, one exclusively from Revelation, and the remaining six by a mix of references from the aforementioned sources plus Genesis and Esther. In total only eleven of Ames’s twenty-seven points (i.e., 40%) have any reference to Pauline texts. While we do not want to prejudge Ames’s treatment of adoption, it is worth taking note of the emerging pattern. We found *WCF* 12 to have drifted somewhat from a tightly Pauline presentation of adoption, we noted Perkins’s conflation of the Pauline concept of adoption with the Johannine concept of regeneration, and we now note that Ames’s presentation of the Pauline doctrine of adoption stands on a foundation only 40% Pauline (and only 15%—four of twenty-seven—from Paul’s adoption texts). This phenomenon is explained by the Puritans themselves in *WCF* 1.9, which states:

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense

of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.^(y)

^(y) II Pet. 1:20, 21; Acts 15:15, 16.

This analogy of faith, as they called it, stemmed from the conviction that the Bible possesses an intrinsic unity and that it is appropriate, therefore, to use the “general sense of the meaning of Scripture, constructed from the clear or unambiguous loci as the basis for interpreting unclear or ambiguous texts” (Beeke and Jones 2012, 59). While we agree with this principle in a general sense, Trumper notes with respect to the Puritan application of it that it seems at times to have flattened out “the distinctive emphases of the various authors of Scripture by conflating the themes they treat” (Trumper 2001, 240). This observation will not lead us to disregard their teaching on adoption, but we will be especially alert to those aspects of it that are most distinctively Pauline.

Chapter 28 of *Marrow* consists of twenty-seven clauses, which may be grouped into four. Clauses 1 to 8 address the nature of adoption and its place in the *ordo salutis*. Clauses 9 to 21 discuss differences—of which Ames sees four—between human and divine adoption. Clauses 22 to 24 highlight the ministry of the Spirit in adoption. Finally, clauses 25 to 27 list three fruits of adoption. We shall examine these four groupings momentarily but note first that, whereas *WCF* 12 preferred the descriptor “children of God,” Ames chooses the more faithfully Pauline “sons” throughout.

In group 1 only one of the eight clauses is grounded exclusively by Pauline texts, namely clause 3, which begins with the rather curious assertion: “This [gracious sentence of adoption] is pronounced with the same difference in degrees as justification” (Ames [1639] 2014a, 120). What Ames means by this is that God’s pronouncement of someone as justified and/or adopted “allows for no degrees of it, properly so-called, but it is altogether and at once perfect in one act only” (ibid., 115). It is, in other words, a binary matter—people are either justified/adopted or they are not; there are no degrees of justification/adoption. Yet, according to Ames, “with respect to ... the manifestation, sense, and effects [of justification/adoption, they have] different degrees” (ibid.). Adoption begins “in God’s predestination” (Eph 1:5), manifests subsequently “in Christ” (Gal 4:4–5), and is finally “in believers” by the

ministry of the Spirit (Gal 4:5; *ibid.*). Ames's interpretation of Galatians 4:4–5 as denoting union with Christ seems out of step with Paul's redemptive-historical narration. This is not to deny the close relationship between the believers' union with Christ and all the soteriological benefits that arise out of that union—instead it is to note that Ames seems to have imposed an *ordo salutis* grid on a redemptive-historical text. Even so, we can affirm Ames's main points without reservation: namely that one is either adopted or not, that the accomplishment of adoption is effected by all three persons of the Trinity acting in distinct ways to that end, and that those actions of the persons of the Trinity work out, temporally, in an identifiable sequence.

By way of the unusual phrase “adoption is the gracious sentence of God” (Ames [1639] 2014a, 120), Ames rightly draws attention to God's election as the ultimate source of adoption. Likewise, Ames rightly stipulates that God does this “for Christ's sake” (*ibid.*), which appears, in the context of his presentation, to mean “in Christ.” In other words, Ames follows closely in Paul's footsteps in saying that our adoption was sealed by the election of God, in Christ, “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). The remainder of group 1, however, consists of a discussion of the *ordo salutis*—in particular the relationship between adoption, justification, and redemption as salvific benefits flowing from God's eternal decree. In this regard, Ames rightly insists that adoption and justification are distinguishable benefits, and that redemption and justification both serve as the foundation of adoption (cf. Gal 4:4–5).

In the second group of clauses (i.e., 9 to 21), Ames explains four differences between divine and human adoption. The first has to do with the differing grounds of rights to an inheritance, but unfortunately Ames's argument is not clear. The second highlights that in the human case only external goods (i.e., status, inheritance) are conferred, whereas in the divine “a new inward life [is communicated] ... by mystical conjunction and communion with Christ” (Ames [1639] 2014a, 121–122). The third difference is that human adoption arises out of lack of a natural son, but divine “out of an abundance of goodness” (*ibid.*, 122). Given in this goodness are “mystical conjunction” (*ibid.*) with Christ; a relationship with God as Father that, unlike Adam's and because of the believer's union with Christ, can never be lost; incorporation into the household of God and assurance of his paternal care; and “eternal blessedness” as an inheritance (*ibid.*, 122–123). The fourth difference is that, whereas in the case of human adoption the

adopted son succeeds the father into an inheritance, in the divine case succession does not apply and, instead, the adopted son becomes a participant in the assigned inheritance.

In the third group Ames notes the role of the Spirit, who is given to the adopted to assure them of their salvation, the dignity of their status as adopted sons, and the certainty of the inheritance to come. In the fourth and final group Ames lists three “fruits” of adoption (ibid., 123–124)—though of eleven verses cited only six are Pauline and only two in reasonable proximity to the adoption loci. We are not surprised, therefore, that Ames’s development of this theme seems not to follow Paul’s as closely as it could. The first fruit is freedom from the bondage of the law, sin, and the world. Though this sounds Pauline, Ames roots it in John 8:32 and 36. The second is that the adopted, as partakers of Christ, are made prophets, priests, and kings. Third and finally, all men and angels are subject to the dominion of the adopted, or perform ministry for them, or have their actions turned for their good.

Elsewhere in *Marrow*, Ames ([1639] 2014a, 176), like Calvin before him, sees the realisation of adoption as a defining characteristic of the New Covenant vis-à-vis the Old. Furthermore, it is the adopted who shall possess an inheritance in eternity and who may, therefore, live in expectation of it now (ibid., 186). Ames ([1659] 2014b, 92) was also careful to distinguish between the ‘by nature’ Sonship of Christ and the ‘by grace’ sonship of the adopted. Even so, Ames (ibid., 273–274) teaches, our status as adopted sons means we ought to come to God with confidence in the knowledge of his favour towards us.

3.5.4 Thomas Watson (1620–1686)

Relatively little is known of the man—even his dates of birth and death are estimates, says Charles Spurgeon ([1692] 2003, vii) in his memoir to Thomas Watson. Watson is included in this study for two complementary reasons. First, he is representative of a generation of Puritan ministers, all of whom were educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and whose cumulative influence on evangelicalism has been

considerable.⁹⁰ Second, Watson's *A Body of Divinity* is his exposition of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* delivered as sermons to ordinary churchgoers and not as lectures to scholars.⁹¹ As such, and as, in Spurgeon's estimation, "one of the most precious of the peerless works of the Puritans" (*ibid.*), its value for our study is in the fact that it records how the doctrine of adoption as presented in *WCF* 12 was subsequently expounded for the edification of the church.

Watson begins his treatment on adoption with an exposition of John 1:12.⁹² This is followed by three "positions" (Watson [1692] 2003, 232), five "questions" (*ibid.*, 232–234), and four "uses" (*ibid.*, 234–240). Beginning with the positions, they are that adoption is: (1) for all nations; (2) for both male and female, and (3) an act of God's grace. Watson supports position (1) by reasoning rightly, from Paul's teaching, that though adoption once belonged only to ethnic Israel (Rom 9:4), now, "in the time of the gospel" (*ibid.*, 232), all nations are embraced by it. In this way, though only implicitly, Watson seems to parallel the soteriological accomplishment of adoption with the 'time of the gospel.' Also from Paul's teaching, and in support of position (2), Watson picks up the apostle's appropriation of Old Testament prophecies foretelling a time when God would become a father to both sons and daughters (2 Cor 6:18).⁹³ Again it is the realisation of a new kind of familial relationship between God and man that is seen as the fulfilment of what was promised. With regard to position (3), Watson cites Ephesians 1:5 to highlight God's grace and argues that by nature no man or woman has the right to sonship but that "adoption is a mercy spun out of the bowels of free grace" (*ibid.*).

By way of his five 'questions' and four 'uses,' Watson aimed to instruct believers in the doctrine of adoption and to help them discern its implications for their own spiritual

90 Spurgeon says Emmanuel College at the time deserved to be known as "the School of Saints, the nursing mother of gigantic evangelical divines" for the considerable number of Puritan ministers trained there and for their subsequent influence (Spurgeon [1692] 2003, vii).

91 Watson's chapter titles in *A Body of Divinity* do not follow the *Shorter Catechism* absolutely rigidly, and some material from the *Catechism* is omitted from *A Body* entirely. Nevertheless, the general correspondence between the two is clear.

92 Yet another Puritan theologian conflating the Johannine notions of regeneration and new life with the Pauline concept of adoption. By now we have come to expect Puritan exposition to adhere to different norms than we have become used to in modern evangelicalism. Even so, the fact that of Watson's seventy-two Bible citations in his chapter on adoption only four (i.e., 6%) are from the Pauline adoption passages, and only sixteen (i.e., 22%) are Pauline at all, is noteworthy.

93 Cf. Isa 43:6; Jer 31:9; Hos 1:10.

state. We will not detail Watson's questions and answers individually, but rather take note of the key features of his understanding of the doctrine as revealed in them.

From Watson's 'questions' we note, first, that he understands adoption to create a new relationship in which the greater party bestows unmerited blessings on one who was previously a stranger (Watson [1692] 2003, 232–233). Watson sees great dignity in the status of sonship thus bestowed; he says, "it were much for God to take a clod of dust, and make it a star; it is more for him to take a piece of clay and sin, and adopt it for his heir" (ibid., 233). From this we see, second, Watson's appreciation that adoption entails an inheritance; to be a son is to be an heir, and to be a son of God is to be an heir of the kingdom of God (cf. Luke 12:32), which Watson celebrates as excelling all earthly kingdoms in riches, in "tranquility" (i.e., peace) and in stability (i.e., permanence; ibid., 233–234). Third, Watson notes that adoption and the Spirit belong together. It is the ministry of the Spirit to give a new nature, so that adoption entails not just a change of legal or relational status but also actual, experiential sanctification. Fourth, Watson understands that adoption denotes freedom from the curse of the law, the dominion of sin, and the tyranny of Satan. Fifth, citing Galatians 3:26 to highlight the instrumentality of faith, Watson rightly notes that the privilege of adoption is given only in Christ.⁹⁴

Turning to Watson's 'uses' of the doctrine, we note first that of the forty-two Bible citations in this section of his chapter only eleven are Pauline, and none are from the five scriptural adoption loci. Nevertheless, Watson's first use of the doctrine is that it should cause us to wonder at the "amazing love" of God (Watson [1692] 2003, 234), and this accords neatly with Paul's teaching in Ephesians 1:5 that "in love [God] predestined us for adoption to himself as sons," and that this was "to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph 1:6). Second, in order to know whether or not they truly are saved, Watson would have the believer assess his or her spiritual condition against the marks that should accompany adoption. The first of these marks Watson sees as consistent obedience to the Word of God, in faith, and to the end that God would be glorified in

94 Our five observations of Watson's doctrine of adoption do not correspond directly to his five questions from which we have drawn them. The fact that we have synthesised his teaching into five observations is merely coincidental.

it.⁹⁵ Next, the adopted love to be in the presence of the Father—and his presence is experienced in the means of grace (i.e., in the preaching of his Word, participation in the ordinances, and in prayer). Third, the adopted know the guidance of God’s Spirit. By this Watson means that the Spirit continually leads them to God, inclining their will to his (as revealed in his Word) and their desire to holiness. The final mark of the adopted is that they love God’s children, notwithstanding their imperfections. “We love the good we see in God’s children,” says Watson, “we admire their graces, we pass by their imprudencies” (ibid., 239). The third use of adoption, Watson exhorts, is to cause the adopted to rejoice in the benefits of adoption. “[The adopted are] King’s children and have great privileges and freedoms” (ibid.). Watson goes on to describe the privileges and freedoms he has in mind, and they generally convey the idea that God’s children are under his protection from evil and that they may count all his promises to them as sure. The fourth and final ‘use’ Watson envisages is that a right knowledge of adoption should move the adopted to praise God’s mercy. “We have enough in us to move God to correct us, but nothing to move him to adopt us,” says Watson (ibid., 240).

In summary, Watson’s contribution was not to the development of the doctrine per se. His theological treatment of adoption was comparatively thin, and his biblical treatment was intermingled with so many (sometimes tenuously) related passages that it becomes hard to say that he is dealing distinctively with adoption. Watson’s contribution, rather, was to bear the results of more formal, technical treatments of adoption (i.e., *WCF* 12 as distilled in the *Shorter Catechism*) to a broader audience in non-technical language, and to help that audience appreciate its application to their own spiritual lives.

95 Watson is careful to add that this obedience is an “evangelical obedience; which, though it be not to satisfaction, it is to acceptation” (Watson [1692] 2003, 238). By this he means that the true believer loves God’s law and longs to obey it, even though their actual obedience will always fall short. Once again we cannot help but hear the Johannine echoes (cf. especially 1 John) in Watson’s argument at this point.

3.5.5 The doctrine of adoption in the Puritan era: A summary of key emphases

In drawing this section to a close, we take note of some of the key emphases, with respect to the doctrine of adoption, of the Puritans and identify both continuities and discontinuities with their patristic and Calvinian forebears.

To begin with we note that the Puritans appreciated the redemptive-historical character of adoption—spanning the election of the Father in eternity past to the eschatological age to come—as did the patristic fathers and Calvin. It must be noted, however, that though this continuity is identifiable, the Puritans were less explicit about the redemptive-historical character of the doctrine than were Calvin and the fathers. Both the Puritans and the earlier writers saw adoption as ultimately rooted in election and as available only in Christ—additional aspects of continuity. Thereafter, however, whereas earlier theologians gave closer attention to the redemptive-historical unfolding of God's salvific purposes, the Puritans seemed comparatively more interested in the *ordo salutis*. This may be seen in that the relationships of the elements of salvation to one another are explicitly discussed in their writings, whereas redemptive-historical considerations must largely be drawn out by implication. Puritan treatments of the *ordo salutis* were not univocal; sometimes they treated justification and adoption as distinct, and sometimes they subsumed adoption within justification. Related to this, whereas the fathers and Calvin were explicit in their assessment that adoption represented the pinnacle of soteriology, the Puritans sometimes concurred and sometimes muddied that assessment by subsuming it within justification (as did Aquinas).

A notable point of difference is that, whereas the fathers and Calvin often used adoption as a virtual synonym for salvation *in toto*, we do not find this usage in the Puritans. Similarly, and though such a connection may be found in some of their writings, the Puritans did not connect the soteriological accomplishment of adoption to the covenants as explicitly as did those before them.

In continuity with the church fathers, Calvin, and (to a lesser degree) the medieval scholars, we observe a definite appreciation of the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit, not only in giving believers assurance of their eternal adoption and the Father's paternal love for them, but also in producing the life of sonship (i.e., growth in

Christlikeness) in the present. The Puritans were as aware of the eschatological dimension of adoption as were Calvin and the patristic fathers. Further to this, though it is fair to say that the Puritans saw adoption as a Trinitarian accomplishment, again this is more inferred from their writings than it is explicit. The reality of an eternal inheritance featured prominently in their works—both as a hope for the future and as an incentive to faithfulness in the present.

All things considered, our assessment of the Puritan treatment of the doctrine of adoption inclines largely towards Packer's—in other words, that it “was notably deficient” (Packer 2004, 258). To their credit, the inclusion of a chapter dedicated to adoption in the *Westminster Confession* (together with corresponding questions and answers in the *Larger* and *Shorter* catechisms) was an important development. Likewise, their labours to present the doctrine for catechesis were commendable, even though they were not the first to do so. Regrettably outweighing these positive contributions, however, was their decoupling of the doctrine from its Pauline foundation. In view of the Puritan tendency to conflate Pauline adoption with Johannine regeneration or new birth, and by their affording (sometimes only very tenuously related) texts from elsewhere in the Bible equal weight in their development of the doctrine, it is not difficult to understand how it devolved into something less clear and specific than appears in its exclusively Pauline usage. While Beeke and Jones are correct in saying that the doctrine of adoption “was certainly not a neglected topic among the Puritans” (Beeke and Jones 2012, 691), unfortunately the quality of their treatment did not measure up to that of their forebears. Notwithstanding *WCF 12* (which we have seen is not without problems of its own), the comparatively loose exegetical tendencies we have noted saw the doctrine begin to lose shape. It may not be too harsh a judgement to say that the somewhat blurry presentation of adoption in the Puritan period—and bearing in mind the influence of Puritan thought in the founding of the American colonies—contributed to its subsequent fading into the background of Reformed (and broader evangelical) consciousness.

3.6 *The Dutch Further Reformation*

The Dutch *Nadere Reformatie* (Further or Second Reformation) spanned the late sixteenth to mid-eighteenth centuries and is described by Daniel (2019, 69–70; cf.

Beeke 1992, lxxxv–xcvi) as a theology as much for the heart as for the mind—akin in that regard to English Puritanism. Daniel identifies Brakel (1635–1711) as the key theologian of the movement and his magnum opus, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, as the stand-out text. Therein Brakel devotes a chapter to the doctrine of adoption that, regrettably, opens with an argument intended to prove that adoption and spiritual sonship are subsidiary elements of justification. “We have shown that justification does not only consist in acquittal from guilt and punishment, but ... includes spiritual sonship [by adoption],” Brakel (1992–1995, 2:415) asserts. Furthermore, though Brakel hits the right notes with regard to the inherently transformative nature of adoption, he develops this via a mix of texts drawn from John and Paul, and with the Johannine references appearing to lead the argument (*ibid.*, 2:427–430). This tendency, which we noted also in the Puritans, to read one biblical author into another is further evident in Brakel’s (*ibid.*, 2:419–420) assertion that betrothal to Christ in “spiritual marriage” (for which he draws from Hosea, Song of Solomon, 1 Corinthians, Psalms and John’s Gospel) is, in some manner, part of adoption.⁹⁶ Thus it appears Brakel followed closely on Turretin’s heels in subsuming adoption within justification, and the Puritans’ in conflating Pauline adoption with Johannine new birth and also more generally in failing to discern the differing uses of language between different biblical authors. We may say, therefore, that the Dutch Further Reformation followed the Reformed Scholastics and the English Puritans in relegating adoption to the shadows of soteriological reflection.

3.7 *Contemporary scholarship*

The doctrine of adoption has enjoyed some attention in recent decades. At a popular level, writers such as Ferguson (1989, 2017) and Packer (2004) have treated adoption warmly as parts of larger works. At a scholarly level, Trumper (2001) has investigated the historical neglect of the doctrine, and Saito (2016) has traced its role in the confessions of the Reformation period.

Heim’s 2014 dissertation analysed Paul’s use of *υιοθεσία* in Romans and Galatians. Heim’s study falls short of a full-orbed study of adoption, however, for two reasons.

⁹⁶ Muller (2003, 4:251) notes that the image of believers as the bride of Christ, and of spiritual marriage to him, was central to the piety of the Dutch Further Reformation.

First, her intention was not to develop a theology of adoption but rather to advance understanding of the interpretation of biblical metaphors, for which υιοθεσία was selected as the case study. Second, her study omits Paul's use of υιοθεσία in Ephesians—the key text for establishing the electing will of the Father as the protological foundation for the soteriological accomplishment of adoption. Lin's (2017) dissertation studied the construction πνεῦμα υιοθεσία (the Spirit of adoption as sons) in Romans 8:15—a useful but narrowly focused study, and thus not a holistic treatment of the doctrine. The two most important recent expounders of the doctrine are Burke (2006) and Garner (2016).

3.7.1 Trevor Burke

Burke recognises adoption as both a “sociological” (2006, 36–41) and an “organising” (ibid., 41–45) soteriological metaphor. By sociological, Burke simply means that adoption belongs in the realm of the family, as opposed to, for example, justification, which belongs in the realm of the law court. By organising, Burke means that adoption (1) centres in the person and work of Christ; (2) has a “moral focus” (ibid., 41); and (3) is eschatological in nature. It is not clear why Burke has selected these criteria as definitive of an organising schema rather than, for example, the redemptive-historical schema (i.e., Protological—Covenantal—Soteriological—Pneumatological—Eschatological) we have previously noted. Nevertheless, Burke does recognise the redemptive-historical embrace of the metaphor in highlighting the Father's election in eternity (ibid., 73–79), the fact that adoption is achieved through the work of the Son (ibid., 107–120), the Spirit's role in indwelling the adopted for life “between the ‘now’ and ‘not yet’” (ibid., 177–187), and the “eschatological gift” of sonship (ibid., 135–137).

Burke also recognises the moral entailments of adoption and develops this theme through his analysis of the “twin aspects of honour and shame [that] were the foundational social values [of] first-century culture and society” (2006, 152). It is by the indwelling Spirit, Burke rightly argues, that the adopted are enabled to honour (i.e., obey) the Father by “manifest[ing] the family likeness” (ibid., 172).

Of the five emphases that we have traced through our historical study of the doctrine of adoption, all are present, and latter three, especially, are amply evident. It is clear that Burke recognises the inherently transformative nature of Christian salvation, as mediated by the adoption metaphor. It is likewise clear that he sees the ministry of the

indwelling Spirit as empowering such transformation, and that the accomplishment of adoption is an enterprise of the whole Trinity.

3.7.2 David Garner

Garner's treatment of adoption shows him to be in harmony with the five emphases we discerned in our historical survey. We could simply say that he affirms what we already know. However, two aspects of his work deserve mention.

First, Garner finds historical models of the *ordo salutis* deficient as they tend, if they address adoption explicitly at all, to locate it in a planar relationship to other aspects of salvation, such as justification and sanctification. These “forensically fixated versions of the *ordo salutis*,” Garner (2016, 300) argues, confine salvation to the forensic sphere, and adoption, if featured at all, “merely warms courtroom speech with familial features and relational benefits” (ibid., 301). Against constructions of this sort, Garner argues, adoption operates in a different sphere altogether. Garner sees Pauline Christology as essentially filial, and thus “the entire [Pauline] soteriological paradigm” (ibid., 305) as essentially filial. Adoption as sons does not, therefore, reside in a planar relationship to justification or sanctification. Instead, justification and sanctification are manifestations of adoptive sonship. Garner's argument in his recalibration of the *ordo salutis* shows that, for him as for others before, adoption is salvation *in toto*—in his own words, it “embraces the whole” (2016, 306). In this respect, Garner echoes the best interpretive traditions of the past.

Second, Garner argues that Christ was adopted by the Father at his resurrection and that his adoption was necessary to the subsequent adoption of believers (2016, 194–195).⁹⁷ Christ experienced “filial progress” (2016, 202) that resulted in “filial change” (ibid., 205) at his resurrection—whereupon he “enter[ed] a personally, historically, cosmically, and therefore soteriologically different stage of sonship” (ibid., 195).

⁹⁷ Garner distinguishes his view from the adoptionist Christological heresies of the early centuries AD, but nevertheless maintains that Jesus is “the Son of God, ... not only ... ontological[ly], eternal[ly], and archetypal[ly]; [but] also functional[ly], regal[ly], ectypal[ly], temporal[ly], and eschatological[ly]” (2016, 194).

Garner is not the first to have advocated the ‘resurrection-adoption’ position (cf. Scott 1992), but it is a minority position and goes against the grain of long-held views regarding the nature of Christ’s sonship. Aquinas, for example, rejected the notion that Christ could have both an ontological and an adopted sonship, on the basis that sonship belongs to the person and not the nature (Trumper 2019, 207). Garner’s position is also difficult to accept on exegetical or hermeneutical grounds. Exegetically, Paul’s usage of υιοθεσία relates only to elect believers and never to Christ. Furthermore, Galatians 4:4–5 foregrounds Christ’s substitutionary death—not his resurrection—as securing the adoption of those formerly under the law. Hermeneutically, it is unclear why Garner makes the comparatively obscure reference to adoption (if it is there at all) in Romans 1:3–4 control the interpretation of the much clearer teaching of Galatians 4:4–5.

Garner’s reliance on a disputed interpretation of Romans 1:3–4 (cf. Moo 1996, 47–51; Schreiner 2018, 42–49) as the interpretive lens through which to understand adoption undermines his work and detracts from what is an otherwise helpful treatment of the doctrine. Nevertheless, the five emphases we have found in our survey of the historical treatment of the doctrine of adoption are amply evident in Garner.

3.8 *A summary of the doctrine of adoption in church history*

Our objective in this chapter, related to our second subsidiary question, has been to examine how theologians of the past have understood the soteriological accomplishment of adoption. In so doing we have found that much of the treatment of adoption through the history of the church has been wanting. Nevertheless, in concluding this analysis, we now draw attention to the major emphases present in the historical understanding and transmission of the doctrine to the extent that it was faithful to its Pauline roots.

To begin, we note that the best treatments of the patristic periods were both thorough and thoroughly Pauline. The five emphases that stand out from the period may be discerned in nearly all the church’s reflection on adoption from then until the present—though more faithfully so in some periods than others. In brief, those emphases are: (1) that the metaphor of adoption often served as a synonym for salvation *in toto*; (2) that adoption was frequently understood as the chief fulfilment of redemptive

history and the goal of Christ's incarnation; (3) that the objective status of sonship, conferred by adoption, should be accompanied by increasing conformity to the likeness of Christ the True Son—in other words, the fathers understood growth in Christlikeness as inherent to salvation; (4) that it is by the ministry of the indwelling Spirit of adoption that this conformity is effected and that a filial relationship with the Father is enjoyed; and (5) that the accomplishment of adoption is an enterprise of the whole Trinity and a soteriological lens through which to view God himself. The use of the metaphor of adoption in the patristic era was widespread and its pervasiveness in liturgical, catechetical, devotional, and doctrinal works appear to have nurtured a highly relational understanding of Christianity in which transformation was inherent.

Regrettably, between the church fathers and Calvin, those themes must be rather painstakingly dug out of the medieval writers. Deeply buried though they are, at least some of them are there. In Calvin, however, all of those emphases are amply present and brought to even fuller expression than in the church fathers. Calvin rightly saw that the accomplishment of sonship by adoption is the chief blessing of the covenant and the pathway along which the whole of redemptive history moves. Likewise, that adoption to sonship entails growing conformity to the likeness of Christ and the actual experience and enjoyment of a filial relationship to the Father are themes that suffuse his works. Furthermore, by choosing 'Father' as his chief descriptor for God, Calvin chooses adoption as the soteriological metaphor through which to understand, most fundamentally, who God is. It is fair to say that Calvin represents the high point of the church's reflection on the doctrine of adoption to date.

Sadly, with the exception of Knox (who seems to have caught the spirit of his teacher), Calvin's rich portrait of adoption, which nurtured a highly relational understanding of Christianity, was supplanted by a predominantly forensic understanding in which the familial metaphor of adoption faded into the background—even being intentionally subsumed within the inherently judicial metaphor of justification. Furthermore, such treatments of the metaphor as can be found in Reformed Scholasticism, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Further Reformation—even though they do strike some Pauline/Calvinistic notes—tend to be conflated with Johannine new birth. Additionally, the tendency to afford non-Pauline (or non-adoption) texts greater weight in their expositions of the doctrine of adoption saw it devolve into something less clear and

specific than appears in its Pauline and Calvinistic usage. Of all the post-Reformation thinkers, the Puritans probably came closest to Pauline and Calvinistic continuity insofar as they recognised some of the five major emphases we have noted—even if some of these must be inferred in their writings. On the whole, we consider Puritan treatment of the doctrine deficient, though some Pauline/Calvinistic echoes may be heard. The Puritans were not alone in falling short, though, and the disappointing treatments of adoption post-Calvin—by the Scholastics, Puritans, and Dutch alike—saw adoption relegated to the shadows of soteriological reflection.

Contemporary scholarship has begun to rescue adoption from those shadows and, in the main, has proven faithful to the main emphases we have traced from Paul, through the fathers, to Calvin. We aim to maintain that same continuity in our own presentation of the doctrine in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE DOCTRINE OF ADOPTION: A PRESENTATION WITH A PURPOSE

4.1 *Introduction*

The central ambition of this study is to explore the ways in which the Pauline doctrine of adoption bears upon the enterprise of Christian spiritual formation. Thus far we have answered two subsidiary questions. First, in Chapter 2, we asked what the Pauline corpus teaches about the soteriological accomplishment of adoption, and about the purposes and actions of each of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in its accomplishment. Second, in Chapter 3, we asked how theologians past and present have understood the doctrine of adoption. In the former we found that the doctrine of adoption functions as an organising soteriological metaphor that embraces the full sweep of redemptive history, that Paul sees adoption to sonship as the apex of salvific accomplishment, that transformation in Christlikeness is inherent to the nature of salvation-as-adoption, that the ministry of the Spirit of adoption gives effect to this transformation while fostering a filial relationship with the Father, and that the doctrine of adoption provides a lens through which to view the united purpose and distinct actions of the three persons of the Trinity. In the latter study we found that the best treatments of adoption, in particular those of the patristic fathers and Calvin, faithfully transmitted these emphases but that, regrettably, treatments of other periods in church history were either deficient or too few (or both), with the result that the doctrine faded into the shadows of soteriological reflection.

Our study now, in Chapter 4, progresses from the mainly analytical and descriptive tasks of the foregoing to the constructive task of articulating a theology of adoption in such a way as to highlight both its Trinitarian nature and its entailments for Christian

spiritual formation. We will do this by presenting an account of the doctrine informed by Vanhoozer's theo-dramatic metaphor. Our account will span the pre-temporal to eschatological nature of the accomplishment of adoption in keeping with the emphases we have already discerned in Chapters 2 and 3. First, though, we must justify our choice of Vanhoozer's framework as befitting our purposes in this study.

4.2 *Vanhoozer's theo-dramatic metaphor*

To fulfil our objective, we need an understanding of what doctrine *is* and what it is *for*. As to what it is, the following definition will suffice: Doctrine is "a theological formulation that attempts to provide a summary statement of the teaching of Scripture on a particular theological topic" (Grenz, Guretzki, and Nordling 1999, s.v. Doctrine). As to what doctrine is for, Vanhoozer (2005, 77–112) argues that it directs Christians (i.e., both churches and individual believers) to participate rightly in the unfolding drama of redemption. A brief introduction to Vanhoozer's theo-dramatic metaphor will help us.

Beginning with Heidegger's assertion that we have no choice in the matter, that we are simply "thrown into existence" (Heidegger 1980, 321), Vanhoozer adjudges that human knowledge has not produced satisfactory answers to the great questions of ontology (i.e., where do we come from?), anthropology (i.e., what does it mean to be human?) and teleology (i.e., why are we here?). Christian doctrine, he argues, answers these questions and more. It does so, in Vanhoozer's view, by helping us understand the big picture story—the drama—we have been "thrown" into. The overarching story is "a divine drama of redemption ... [in which] each act of the play is set in motion by an act of God" (Vanhoozer 2005, 2). Act 1 is creation and the fall.⁹⁸ Act 2 has to do with God's election, rejection, and restoration of Israel. Act 3 is Jesus. Act 4 begins with the risen Christ sending his Spirit to create the church. Act 5 is the eschaton—the consummation of all things (ibid., 2–3). Christians live now in Act 4. The church lives "between the definitive event of Jesus and the concluding event of the eschaton, poised between memory and hope" (ibid., 3).

98 Whereas Vanhoozer calls Act 1 merely "Creation" we have, for completeness, called it "Creation and fall." Given that Vanhoozer (2005, 2) delimits Act 1 as Genesis 1–3, this seems consistent with his intentions, even though we prefer to include all of Genesis 1–11 in Act 1.

In this time we been “thrown into,” we need more than theoretical knowledge, more than propositions about God and his ways. We need more than just *scientia*—which Vanhoozer understands as objectively true data about God—we also need *sapientia*, which is “engaged knowledge that emotionally connects the knower to the known” (ibid., 13).⁹⁹ The purpose of doctrine in Vanhoozer’s understanding, then, is twofold. First, it is to serve the church by “unfolding the canonical logic of the theo-drama” (ibid., 362). Second, it is to serve the church by “offering dramaturgical direction” (ibid.) so that Christians and churches know how to play their parts in the great theo-drama.

Vanhoozer expands on the foregoing, explaining that “doctrine directs disciples to speak, act, feel and imagine in ways that are fitting to those in Christ” (ibid.).¹⁰⁰ This needs a little unpacking. Dramaturgy is “the art or the theory of writing and putting on plays, especially for the theatre”.¹⁰¹ In Vanhoozer’s theo-dramatic model, the dramaturge corresponds to the theologian, who “makes sense of the script both for the [actors] and for the audience” (Vanhoozer 2005, 244). He or she is responsible to understand the script—its large themes and its details—in the context of the playwright’s intentions and the historical and sociocultural context of its writing, and to convey that understanding to the director and actors so that the production stays true to those original intentions. The theologian as dramaturge, in Vanhoozer’s model, asks not only “What does God say, and where and why does he say it?” (i.e., “What does the script say?”), but also “How can we fit into the theo-dramatic action?” (Vanhoozer 2005, 247).¹⁰² Theological dramaturgy, then, “as a form of textual interpretation, involves both *scientia* and *sapientia*. For ... [its] aim is to produce wise performances or performed wisdom” (ibid.).

99 In saying this, Vanhoozer does not mean to downplay the importance of careful exegesis or of carefully formulated theological propositions grounded in that exegesis. His contention is simply that correct information in and of itself is insufficient to the task of living wisely in Act 4. In his words, “theology is both an exegetical *scientia* that is faithful to the canonical text and a practical *sapientia* that is fitting to the present cultural context” (Vanhoozer 2005, 32).

100 It is worth noting Vanhoozer’s strong resonance with Willard’s description of Christian spiritual formation as “the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself” (Willard 2002, 22).

101 Cambridge English Dictionary, *Dramaturgy*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dramaturgy>. Accessed 15 November 2021.

102 Hwang (2016, 35) argues that the apostle Paul’s chief strategy for the spiritual formation of the early believers was the telling of the “metastory” of Christ and how they (and others) fitted into it. Hwang’s (2016, 51–53) proposal aligns substantially with Vanhoozer’s, and he seems to see pastoral ministry as largely to do with this kind of storytelling, which again corresponds to Vanhoozer’s dramaturge.

In sum, doctrine, according to Vanhoozer, both teaches us the “superobjective”—namely “the completion and perfection of the image of God in humanity, the creation of a people with whom God can fellowship and enjoy right relations” (Vanhoozer 2005, 391)—of the great theo-drama, and gives us dramaturgical direction by renewing our hearts (i.e., the holistic complex of mind, will, emotion, and imagination) such that we play our parts rightly in that drama (cf. Rom 12:1–3). This understanding of the nature and purpose of Christian doctrine justifies the approach we shall take in articulating a doctrine of adoption below. That is, we are concerned to understand the soteriological accomplishment of adoption in relation to the superobjective of the drama, and to present the doctrine in such a way as aids fitting participation in the drama.

4.3 The doctrine of adoption: A theo-dramatic presentation

Figure 4.1 below provides a visual overview of our presentation, which we shall expound thereafter.

Figure 4.1
A visual overview of the doctrine of adoption.

Vanhoozer's "theo-drama"		Pauline adoption loci					Trinitarian emphases			The doctrine of adoption's potential for dramaturgical direction
Super-objective	Acts	Eph 1:4-5	Rom 9:4	Gal 4:4-5	Rom 8:14-15	Rom 8:23	Father	Son	Spirit	
"The completion and perfection of the image of God in humanity, the creation of a people with whom God can fellowship and enjoy right relations" (Vanhoozer 2005, 391).	Pre-production *	"... he chose us [for adoption] ... before the foundation of the world ..."					Purposes and chooses			§4.3.1
	1. Creation & Fall						Creates man (i.e. humanity) for sonship			
	2. Israel		"... to them belong the adoption ..."				Foreshadows and promises			§4.3.3
	3. Jesus			"God sent forth his Son ... so that we might receive adoption as sons."			Sends the Son	Obeys the Father		§4.3.4
	4. Church				"... all who are led by the Spirit ... are sons of God. For ... you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons ..."		Guarantees ultimate salvation	Co-sends the Spirit	Indwells, assures, and progressively transforms adopted sons	§4.3.5
	5. Eschaton					"... we ... wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."	Receives glory	Welcomes adopted sons as co-heirs of his eternal inheritance	Completes the transformation of adopted sons to the likeness of Christ	§4.3.6
		* The pre-temporal era does not feature in Vanhoozer's five-act scheme. We have added it—under the heading "Pre-production," in keeping with the theatrical model—for completeness.								

4.3.1 Pre-production

The drama begins behind drawn curtains, before time, in the *pactum salutis*—the eternal covenant between the persons of the Holy Trinity. Bavinck explains that the temporal outworking of God’s salvific purposes “does not hang in the air but rests on an eternal, unchanging foundation, the counsel and covenant of the triune God infallibly applied and executed” (Bavinck 2011, 398). It is surely significant that the New Testament passage in which we are given clearest sight of what transpired behind the curtains in the counsel of the Trinity “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4) frames those salvific purposes in terms of adoption to sonship. Garner rightly discerns this dynamic in Ephesians 1, saying that “adoption resides in the *pactum salutis* ... [and] attains in history because it was purposed [in eternity past]” (Garner 2016, 299). In this *pactum salutis* there is both unity of purpose and distinction of action. Concerning this dynamic, Berkhof explains:

Now we find that in the economy of redemption there is, in a sense, a division of labour: the Father is the originator, the Son the executor, and the Holy Spirit the applier. This can only be the result of a voluntary agreement among the persons of the Trinity, so that their internal relations assume the form of a covenant life. In fact, it is exactly in the Trinitarian life that we find the archetype of the historical covenants, a covenant in the proper and fullest sense of the word, the parties meeting on a footing of equality, a true *suntheke*” (Berkhof 1949, 270, emphasis original).

Whilst the united purpose and distinct actions of all three persons of the Trinity are on display in Ephesians 1, it is especially to the Father that the apostle Paul draws our attention. It was the Father who desired sons, who purposed to adopt them to himself in and through his own eternally begotten Son.¹⁰³ It was the Father who elected and promised an eternal inheritance to them. It is especially striking that this—the adoption of sons, purposed in eternity past and accomplished in history—is held up as the jewel

103 In affirming that the Father “desired” sons, we must simultaneously deny that this desire arose out of any lack on his part or within the Trinity (cf. Acts 17:25). Rather, the Father’s desire arose from the overflow of love for his own eternally begotten Son. In other words, it was a desire that arose not from lack but from super-abundance.

in which the ultimate *telos* of all things is most radiant: the adoption of sons is, three times, “to the praise of [the Father’s] glory” (Eph 1:6, 12, 14).¹⁰⁴

Thus we may say as follows:

The adoption of the elect was always God’s intention and the certainty of its accomplishment as sure as the commitment of the persons of the Trinity to the *pactum salutis*, which, in turn, is as sure as the commitment of the persons of the Trinity to the praise of the glorious grace of the Father. The doctrine of adoption is thus tied up with ultimate things: the highest purposes of God and the surest possible commitment to their accomplishment. The doctrine of adoption also teaches us that God, who reveals himself on the canvas of time first as the self-existent Creator (i.e., Act 1: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1), does so within a story that is ultimately framed by his Fatherhood. Furthermore, that Fatherhood is given specific character in Ephesians 1: it is Fatherhood that chooses from among the children of wrath (Eph 2:3) and, in love, freely elects to adopt some to himself as sons. In short, it is a Fatherhood characterised by unconstrained grace.

This glimpse behind the curtain is rich with significance for Christians. More on that in Chapter 5, but we sense already that the great drama that we are ‘thrown into’ is one both rooted in, and inexorably moving towards the realisation of, ultimate things beyond our control. We are not the authors of this story. We do not determine its arc, or its purpose, or its rules. The reality we are thrown into is already invested with meaning, and its rules reflect the character of the playwright. We are actors on a stage that exists independently of us, and in a drama that is, ultimately, about the glory of the playwright. This is great comfort to those upon whom the playwright’s favour rests, and great danger to those who defy him. To play our parts fittingly—in accord with the

104 The late R. C. Sproul was well known for his teaching on the theological significance of three-fold repetition in the Scriptures. He argued that “to mention something three times in succession is to elevate it to the superlative degree, to attach to it emphasis of superimportance” (Sproul 1998, 25). “Only once in sacred Scripture,” Sproul continues, “is an attribute of God elevated to the third degree. ... The Bible says that God is holy, holy, holy” (ibid., 26). Borrowing Sproul’s argument for our purposes, we note that only once (to our knowledge) in Scripture is a purpose of God repeated three-fold and thereby elevated to the superlative degree: that the glory of God would be praised (Eph 1:6, 12, 14). How significant that this superimportant purpose (to borrow again from Sproul) is met in the accomplishment of adoption.

playwright's intentions to bring glory to himself—we must now see how Acts 1 through 5 have been written and how we fit in.

4.3.2 Act 1: Creation and fall

The curtain rises on Act 1 and the playwright himself takes centre stage. God creates the heavens and the earth in all their magnificence, and at once creation “declare[s] [his] glory” (Ps 19:1). Immediately we see creation conform to God’s ultimate purpose to bring glory to himself. God surveys all he has created—including man, made in his image and likeness (Gen 1:26)—and declares it all “very good” (Gen 1:31), where the word good “indicates a state or function appropriate to ... purpose” (Gordon 1997, 353). This point bears repeating: in God’s own estimation, creation in its Edenic state fulfilled its purpose, namely the praise of his glory (cf. Eph 1:6, 12, 14).¹⁰⁵

The pinnacle of the created order was man, who was made “in [God’s] image, after [his] likeness” (Gen 1:26). Walton rightly recognises a subsequent passage in which the birth of Seth is described as “perhaps the most significant for determining how we ought to interpret the image of God” (Walton 2001, 131). Genesis 5:1–3 presents a clear parallel between the creation of Adam, who is called the “son of God” in Luke’s genealogy (Luke 3:38), “in the likeness of God” and Adam’s own fathering of a son, Seth, “in his own likeness, after his image.” We have already noted that sonship is among the dominant themes of the Bible, and that the biblical concepts of sonship and image, though distinguishable, are tightly interwoven.¹⁰⁶ Ferguson affirms this relationship, saying that “to be a son, and to be in the image and likeness of your father, are synonymous ideas” (Ferguson 1989, 6–7).

At this point in the play it is necessary that the dramaturge supply further insight into the relationship between image and sonship.¹⁰⁷ That man is created in the image of God means, according to Bavinck, that he “is fit to know [God]” as he reveals himself to us (Bavinck 2011, 61). And how exactly does he reveal himself? Bavinck answers:

105 It is important to note that all three persons of the Trinity were active in creation. The Father’s initiative and sovereignty are most apparent in Gen 1, but the Spirit’s presence is attested in the same passage (Gen 1:2) and the Son’s elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., John 1:1; Col 1:16; 2 Tim 1:9; Jude 25).

106 See our discussion at section 2.6.2.1 herein.

107 We will lean heavily on New Testament teaching for this. Recalling Vanhoozer’s description of the role of the dramaturge, we are comfortable drawing from a much later part of the script to aid our understanding of this early scene.

as Father (ibid.).¹⁰⁸ This entails that the consummate expression of the image and likeness of God is to relate to him rightly as Father. In other words, to live rightly in relationship with him as his son. Thus the image of God is perfected in Christ, *the Son*. Bavinck expands:

The words ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ do not suggest that we have been created after something in God that is called ‘image’ or ‘likeness’, but that we *are* his image and likeness. This does not refer to certain attributes, either on God’s side or ours, such as the intellect or soul, but rather that the *whole* human person is the image of the whole deity. Thus the meaning of God’s image is given to us fully in the Son, who is the Word (λόγος); the Son (υἱός); the image (εἰκών), or imprint (χαρακτήρ), of God (John 1:1, 14; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3); the one to whom we must be conformed (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; Phil 3:21; Eph 4:23f.; 1 John 3:2). Like the Son, so also humans as such *are* altogether the image of God. Only the Son, of course, is image in an absolute sense; he is the *eternal* only begotten Son while we are *created* ‘sons’ of God (Bavinck 2011, 318, emphasis original).

This insight is critical to our understanding of, and fitting participation in, the great theodrama. Creation in its pre-fall, Edenic state found its apex in the creation not just of creatures, but of image-bearers. In other words: created *sons*.¹⁰⁹ It was at this point that God declared it all “very good” (Gen 1:31)—indicating that it was functioning to the end for which he created it, namely the display of his own glory. This means that Christians, adopted by God, most glorify him simply by *being* sons. If we ask ourselves what exactly it means to simply be a *son* of God, we find our answer by looking to *the Son*, who is by nature “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). We will unpack this further in due course but note for now that it should not surprise us—given our pre-production glimpse behind the curtain—that a drama that is essentially about the Father should play out largely in terms of his relationship to his beloved Son.

108 Recalling our discussion in Chapter 3, we note Bavinck’s alignment with Calvin on this point.
 109 Recall Calvin’s notion of “constituted” sonship (e.g., 1960, 2.14.5).

What should surprise us (if we did not already know the remainder of the script) is that, somehow, we “children of wrath” (Eph 2:3) are drawn into that relationship, as no less than sons, in the Son. Why should this surprise us? Because creation did not remain in its original, Edenic state. Something happened: the created image-bearers rebelled against the Father. The creature, though made in his Creator’s likeness, was discontent with his status and reached for equality with God himself. This “monstrous wickedness” (Calvin 1960, 2.1.4) brought ruin upon all creation. The judgement of death had been promised for defiance (Gen 2:17); and death did indeed enter creation through that “monstrous” defiance (Rom 5:12). Thus the image of God in man, though not utterly destroyed, was “defaced by sin” (John Owen, quoted in Kapic 2007, 39). The relationship between God and man, once “very good” (Gen 1:31), at once became very bad.

Calvin says that “when Adam was despoiled, human nature was left naked and destitute” (Calvin 1960, 2.1.7). By nature, therefore, man can no longer relate to God as son to Father. Calvin goes on to explain that the principle of reproduction in the likeness of one’s father means that Adam’s corruption “was conveyed in a perpetual stream ... into [his] descendants” (ibid.). Thus the image and likeness of God originally present in Adam was marred and “all of us, who have descended from impure seed, are born infected with the contagion of sin ... ‘For who can bring a clean thing from an unclean? There is not one.’ [Job 14:4]” (2.1.5). Thus, on the same principle, sonship is irrecoverable. It is, by the laws of nature, lost forever.

Man’s loss of likeness to God becomes immediately evident as brother murders brother (cf. Cain in Gen 4:1–8) and successive generations become increasingly hardened in their defiance of God (cf. Lamech in Gen 4:23–24). It is not long before the corruption of the image of God in man has reached so deep that God pronounces judgement:

The wickedness of man was great in the earth, and ... every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ... So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land ... for I am sorry that I have made them.” (Gen 6:5–7)

The ruin of mankind is amply evident, and devastating judgement is executed in the form of the great flood by which God “blots out” all mankind. But, even as his judgement covers the earth, God’s ultimate purpose to bring glory to himself in the display of his grace is not forgotten, and he chooses Noah and his family for salvation and as the family through which mankind will be given a fresh start (Gen 6:8–9:17). All too soon, however, the audience discovers that this solution was not enough as the actions of Noah’s own family prove that blotting out wicked mankind will not do—rather, wickedness itself must be taken out of man. As the generations follow, so wickedness once again finds ever more opportunities for expression. Nimrod, whose name is thought to mean ‘we shall rebel,’ becomes the archetype of man’s defiance and leads the people in a collective effort to rise up against God by building a tower in Babel as a symbol of their independence of him (Gen 10:8–11:9; cf. Hamilton 1990, 338). Once again God brings judgement, this time by frustrating the plans of Nimrod and his accomplices and scattering them across the earth.

Created sonship is lost forever, the image of God in man is thoroughly despoiled and, as the curtain closes on a scene of judgement, the audience wonders whether God will again show grace. And, if he does, will the downward spiral of defiance just keep repeating? How can God deal not just with the wickedness *of* man, but the wickedness *in* man?

Thus we may now say a little more as regards adoption:

Though adoption itself has not yet appeared on the stage, we now understand the context in which it will later make its entrance. Within the overarching narrative of a Father who purposes to display his glory—and, more pointedly, the glory of his *grace* (Eph 1:6)—we now understand that a Father–son relationship with his creatures was always his desire, and that he made them in such a way as to be able to have and enjoy such a relationship with him. Notwithstanding this generosity, his created sons wickedly defied him and, in so doing, subjected all creation to the reign of death. Not only creation external to themselves, but also man himself was ruined—the image of God in him defaced and his likeness to God despoiled.

4.3.3 Act 2: Israel

In Act 2 we begin to see why the apostle Paul teaches that the accomplishment of adoption is “to the praise of [the Father’s] glorious *grace*” (Eph 1:6, emphasis added).¹¹⁰ Though created sonship is forever lost, and though God must—for he is “holy, holy, holy” (Isa 6:3) and cannot turn a blind eye to defiance—be true to his word of judgement, Act 2 sees promises of restored relationship and foreshadowings of restored sonship that leave the audience wondering how this tension can possibly be reconciled. How will the great drama unfold? To begin with, we discover that Adam’s failure “did not abrogate the doxological and moral purpose of his existence” (Garner 2016, 76). God remains committed to his ultimate purpose—the praise of his glorious *grace*—and though in Adam’s rebellion *created* sonship is lost, hope appears in the form of “*covenantal* sonship” (Garner 2016, 165, emphasis added). Though adoption itself must wait for a later Act, this *covenantal* foreshadowing of it certainly stirs anticipation.

The curtain rises and again the Father takes centre stage, this time in making a covenant with Abram (cf. Gen 12:1–3). The language of sonship is not used in this encounter but, importantly, the language of blessing—first spoken by God over his image-bearers in Eden (cf. Gen 1:28)—is. Created sonship is lost, but God has not assigned man to judgement without hope; the curse has entered creation, but it remains the Father’s prerogative to bless. The Father’s benevolent care is evident, and this display of grace causes anticipation to rise in the hearts of the audience. Furthermore, God’s promises to Abram (in Gen 12:1–3 and expanded upon in Gen 15 and 17) reveal that his gracious purposes will be unfolded through a nation yet to appear on stage. In time this nation, Israel, does appear and God says of it, “Israel is my ... son” (Exod 4:22). Cook (1978, 138) and Knight (1998, 160) argue that the event that gave context to this declaration (i.e., the exodus) constitutes God’s adoption of Israel. This is mistaken, though, as God’s own words through the prophet Hosea—“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos 11:1)—

110 Arnold affirms that ‘grace’ should be regarded as an objective genitive relating to the verbal idea of ‘praise’, and that ‘glory’ should be understood as an attributive genitive modifying ‘grace’ (Arnold 2010, loc. 1948–1959). Thus it is God’s grace that is specifically the focus of praise. In fact, such is the emphasis on God’s grace that Arnold translates Eph 1:6 as “to the praise of his glorious *grace* which he *graced* us with in the beloved” (ibid., emphasis added).

clearly show that Israel's sonship pre-dated the exodus. Lagrange states the case clearly:

Yahweh was father and Israel was his son because he had brought them into existence. ... It is a question of national existence, of the creation of a particular people. ... As van Hoonacker clearly put it: "The status of sonship is *presupposed* in Israel"; it was as old as the nation itself. Israel did not become a son by adoption, being already a nation and then subsequently chosen by Yahweh; it was Yahweh who brought them into being, and for that reason he is their father (Lagrange 1908, 482–483, emphasis original).

Burke (2006, 50–51) concurs, arguing that though adoption does not feature, God's relationship to Israel is characterised by his paternal love for and care of the nation. The Father set his covenant love upon Israel (cf. Deut 7:6–7), cared for Israel as a father for his infant son (cf. Hos 11:3), and defended and provided for Israel through the forty years of wilderness wandering (cf. Deut 1:29–31). Further evidencing the father–son nature of the relationship, God promised Israel an inheritance—the promised land (Gen 12:1; 15:7–21; 17:8; Deut 7:8; 34:1–4; Josh 1:2–6). Israel did nothing to earn or merit the land; it was simply given by God as an inheritance: "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Command the people of Israel, and say to them, When you enter the land of Canaan (this is the land that shall fall to you for an *inheritance*, the land of Canaan as defined by its borders)" (Num 34:2, emphasis added; cf. Josh 13:7).

Even Israel's own disobedience does not disqualify them as heirs. A much later scene in Act 2 shows Judah (i.e., the surviving remnant of Israel) in exile in Babylon and the prophet Ezekiel prophesying their return to the promised land in the language of inheritance. God himself speaks to the war-ravaged land of Canaan and says to it, "I will let people walk on you, even my people Israel. And they shall possess you, and you shall be their *inheritance*" (Ezek 36:12, emphasis added). Likewise, when God details the allotment of land, he does so in terms of inheritance (cf. Ezek 45:1; 47:14; 48:29). Wright astutely observes that, given the prominence of the gift of land as inheritance in the book of Deuteronomy, "the sonship of Israel ... has a much more central place in the theology of [the] book than one might deduce from the sole direct

reference (Deut 14:1)” (Wright 1990, 19). We would add to Wright and propose that, if sonship is among the central theological motifs of Deuteronomy, then it follows that it must be among the central theological motifs of the entire Old Testament. Our earlier analysis bears this out.

Our point at this juncture, however, is not to recapitulate our analysis of the Old Testament motif of sonship, nor to expound a theology of inheritance. Rather, it is to show that, even after Adam’s forfeiture of created sonship, God still relates to his people as a father to a son—albeit an oft-wayward one. And God expects Israel to relate to him as a son should to a father: in trusting obedience. Deuteronomy 14:1, for example, grounds the call to obedience on the fact that “you are the sons of the LORD your God” (cf. Deut 32:5–6, 18–19). The same dynamic recurs throughout the prophets (e.g., Isa 1:2; 30:1–9; Jer 3:14, 19, 22; 31:9, 18–20; Mal 1:6; 2:10). It is clear that, notwithstanding Adam’s sin and the forfeiture of created sonship, God still relates to his chosen people as a father to his son. Likewise, it is clear that Israel thought of God in the same terms (cf. Isa 63:16). Fundamentally, the relationship between God and Israel is one of father to son.

Even so, the relationship remains less than it should be. The Father’s commitment to Israel—qua Father—flows from his unconstrained election of them as part and parcel of the superobjective of the great theo-drama. But the reality of the relationship falls short—it is less than “very good” (Gen 1:31). Israel is frequently defiant and rebellious. The reality of sin, both its offence and its power, cannot be wished away. It has entered the world and death now reigns (Rom 5:12–14).

As Act 2 enters its final scene the audience wonders what to make of these things. There was a sonship possessed and lost in Adam (i.e., Act 1). There remains, by pure grace, a sonship promised and foreshadowed in Israel (i.e., Act 2). The Edenic pattern of Act 1 shows us that God completes what he begins but, even though Israel’s sonship summons memories of Eden, it is clear that Act 2 cannot be the end of the drama. A new Sabbath Day in which everything is again ‘very good’ is yet to dawn. But the curtain does not fall on despondency. Just as Act 2 began, so it ends—with the Father centre stage. Now he declares, through the prophet Jeremiah, that he has “loved [Israel] with an everlasting love” (Jer 31:3) and that he will rescue them, “for [he is] a father to Israel” (Jer 31:9). At one level this merely foretells the end of Israel’s exile in

Babylon for, under the Father's hand, this discipline had served its purpose for the good of his "dear son ... [his] darling child ... [for whom his] heart yearns" (Jer 31:18–20). There was a historical referent to this particular rescue, but it becomes clear that return from exile is not all that is in view as, once back in the promised land, Israel once again falls short of faithful sonship. Rebuking Israel by the prophet Malachi, God exposes their polluted worship in terms of a Father–son relationship. "A son honours his father ... If then I am a father, where is my honour?" (Mal 1:6), God asks. Israel's new address has not produced new hearts. But Jeremiah's words foretold more than mere relocation. In a passage bursting with paternal affection, God declares a time when he "will forgive their iniquity, and ... remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:34). Not only will the Father forgive; he will "write [his law] on their hearts. And [he] will be their God, and they shall be [his] people" (Jer 31:33). True, 'very good' sonship promised.

Adam failed as a son. Israel failed as son. But the Father has "continued [his] faithfulness to [his people]" (Jer 31:3), and so the curtain falls on Act 2—not, ultimately, with failed sonship in view, but rather with the promise of the unfailing Father to bring all the foreshadowings of restored sonship in Israel to realised substance. How will he do it? What awaits in the next Act?

We may now say a little more:

The drama thus far has highlighted two realities. First, the Father is resolutely committed to the fulfilment of his purposes in and through his image-bearers. Second, his image-bearers seem just as resolutely committed to frustrating his purposes by (more-or-less) constantly defying him. Adoption per se has still not entered the drama, but the developing story of sonship is fast approaching a crisis point. The Father *will*s sons; his image-bearers *will* their independence of him. Created sonship was forfeited in the Garden, and covenantal sonship was spurned time and again in a thousand demonstrations of Israel's rebellious heart. Will the image-bearers have the last word in this drama? Will their rebellion ultimately prove an insurmountable obstacle to the fulfilment of the Father's purposes? The drama thus far has given us little hope of any other outcome. Indeed the picture is dark for, not only must the Father still make good (in an ultimate sense) on his original promise of judgement for defiance against his word, but all his patience has proved is that—quite apart from the matter of justice—man is simply unable to relate rightly to him as son to father. There is a holy justice

problem yet to be solved but, even if that can be solved, surely the amply demonstrated reality of the unholy heart of man must mean that the Father's desire will remain unfulfilled.

What does this add to our understanding of adoption? Simply this: given the obstinate defiance in the heart of man, and the seeming impossibility that what was lost in Adam can ever be regained, if adoption in Christ is the means by which a true and lasting Father–son relationship is achieved, then it will indeed be an accomplishment worthy of the ultimate praise of the Father's grace.

4.3.4 Act 3: Jesus

The curtain rises with the Son centre-stage, and the audience senses that the appearance of a character other than the Father on stage as a new act begins means that something new is about to happen. On the stage of history it is indeed a new thing but, from another perspective, its happening tells us that more happened in pre-production than we were initially aware of. For, in addition to his purposing, the Father also set aside the Son to send him in “the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4). It is not that it was automatic, even less that any circumstance compelled it—rather, the hour of his choosing has arrived, and the Father has taken the “[decisive] ... action” of sending his Son (Burke 2006, 116). Pivotal as this moment is, though, the audience does not yet understand its significance. The apostle Paul explains it in two complementary statements. In the first he teaches that “by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, [God] condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Rom 8:3–4). In the second he teaches that “God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Gal 4:4–5). Both teachings are preceded by Paul's explanations of the ultimate impotence of the law to produce true sonship (cf. Rom 8:3; Gal 3:19–4:3)—a reality that even Moses, the mediator of the law, had foreseen (cf. Deut 30:15–18; 31:16) and that was amply evidenced in the history of Israel. But the Father's settled purpose to bring glory to himself is inextricably bound up with his design to bring his elect to true sonship and so, what the law could not do, the Father did “by sending his own Son” (Rom 8:3; cf. Gal 3:21–22). In both texts Paul emphasises the Father's initiative in sending, where the cognate words (πέμψας, “by sending” in Rom 8:3, and ἐξαπέστειλεν, “sent forth” in Gal 4:4) carry the connotation of someone being

dispatched for a purpose (BDAG, 794), or being sent “for fulfilment of a mission in another place” (BDAG, 346).

Without in any way detracting from the Son’s willingness to obey his Father, it is worth pausing to consider the immensity of what stands behind this mission of the Son, namely the authority of the Father and the immutability of his decrees. In pre-production we noted the *pactum salutis* as the eternal and unchanging foundation for the salvific acts of God in history. It is this reality that undergirds what happens in this moment, namely the sending of the Son to accomplish what the law was unable to accomplish. The Son’s sending, and thus his coming, are part and parcel of the inexorable march of the purposes of the Father for the adoption of his elect. Turretin explains with respect to the necessity of the events wrapped up in the decrees of God that, being decreed of God “by an eternal and unchangeable counsel ... they cannot but take place in the appointed time” (Turretin 1992–1997, 1:320). This is of tremendous importance to the audience because it means that whatever it is that the Son has been sent to accomplish must obtain. And what is that? Paul states it very clearly: the Son’s sending was “to *redeem* those born under the law” (Gal 4:5, emphasis added). The immediate objective of the Son’s mission has to do with sin and objective guilt under the law. Yet Paul goes on, in both passages, to teach that the ultimate salvific accomplishment (i.e., beyond dealing with sin) in view is the adoption of sons (cf. Rom 8:14–17; Gal 4:5).

To recap: The Son’s sending was a necessary outworking of the Father’s intention to bring glory to his own grace in the adoption of sons. The law had failed to produce true sonship in God’s people—in fact, it had produced condemnation—but the Son would accomplish this by redeeming those born under the law. But how? The answer to that question is the main burden of Act 3. The accomplishment of sonship was the main goal of the Son’s incarnation, but it was not automatic upon incarnation. Something, or rather some *things*, had to happen first. First, sin had to be dealt with. We have already affirmed that the Father could not merely turn a blind eye to it: he had promised the just punishment of death for sin (Gen 2:17) and must keep his word. Second, the Spirit had to be given. The first of these occupies the bulk of Act 3, and the second initiates Act 4. We shall come to Act 4 in due course; our question for now is “How will God deal with sin?”

In the two passages we have been examining, Paul explains that the Son was sent “for sin, [to condemn] sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:3)—where the phrase “for sin” in Romans 8:3 should be understood as “as a sin offering” (Schreiner 2018, 399)¹¹¹—and that he “redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). These summary statements (i.e., Rom 8:3 and Gal 3:13) are given fuller treatment elsewhere in Paul’s writings, especially in Romans 3:21–26, in which Paul explains just how it was that God meted out the promised punishment for sin. With this background in mind, we now understand that it was not the Son’s coming alone that enabled the realisation of sonship, but his sacrifice of his life on the cross that was required. As Burke succinctly puts it, the Son’s coming “was not only incarnational but also sacrificial” (Burke 2006, 109).

Act 3 bears out this understanding. The Gospel writers introduce Jesus as the one who would “save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21; cf. Luke 1:77; John 1:29). Importantly, Matthew links this insight with the explanation that Jesus’s coming was in fulfilment of the prophecy that he would be called “Immanuel (which means, God with us)” (Matt 1:23). In other words, the person coming to save his people from sin, for the ultimate goal of accomplishing sonship, was none other than God himself. At the beginning of Jesus’s public ministry, John the Baptist declares him “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), thereby hinting at the sacrifice that would be necessary to the removal of sin. Jesus himself taught that he had come to deal with sin. Twice he claimed authority to forgive sin (Luke 7:48; Matt 9:2 cf. parallel accounts in Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20), and at his last meal with his disciples before the cross he explained that what he was about to do—namely, give his life (Matt 26:2, 12; Mark 14:8; Luke 22:19–20)—was “for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28; Luke 22:37; John 13:8) and would require the shedding of his blood (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). That Jesus understood his mission in relation to the forgiveness of sin is amply evident, but the question must be asked whether or not he understood it in relation to the accomplishment of sonship.

111 Burke (2006, 109) argues that the expression *περὶ ἁμαρτίας* (for sin, Rom 8:3) is a technical one with definite sacrificial connotations. Moo (1996, 480) agrees, saying that in forty-four of its fifty-four uses in the LXX it means ‘sin offering’ and that that is its likely meaning here.

To answer this we note first that much of Jesus's teaching was in parables and much of the rest was more suggestive than explicit (cf. John 16:25). We do not, therefore, hear from Jesus's lips anything quite so direct as "I came to make it possible for you to become sons of God by adoption." Nevertheless, the suggestions are there. For example, in his sermon on the mount Jesus taught that the "blessed" shall be called "sons of God" (Matt 5:9) and that their good works would result in glory to "[their] Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16). His disciples loving their enemies would evidence that they are "sons of [their] Father ... in heaven" (Matt 5:44–45). In his instruction to his disciples on prayer, Jesus taught them to address God as "our Father" (Matt 6:9; Luke 11:2), prefacing that by pointing them to the love and paternal watchfulness of "[their] Father" (Matt 6:1, 4, 6, 8), and encouraged them that their Father would surely answer their prayers (Matt 7:11). He reassured them that their Father saw their secret devotion to him and would reward them for it (Matt 6:18). Likewise, their Father could be relied upon to supply their daily needs (Matt 6:26, 33). In describing the life of discipleship and predicting times in which they would need to defend themselves, Jesus said that "in that hour ... the Spirit of [their] Father" (Matt 10:20) would give them the words they would need and that they need have no fear of their enemies because, ultimately, "[their] Father" (Matt 10:29) determines their days. Significantly, only hours before the cross, Jesus acknowledges that much of his teaching has been suggestive, but he gives the disciples the interpretive lens for it by saying that "the hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly *about the Father*" (John 16:25, emphasis added). In summing up his own ministry as essentially about making the Father known (cf. John 1:18), Jesus brings the accomplishment of sonship to the very epicentre of his mission.

We could extend this exercise through the rest of the Gospel accounts (see especially the Upper Room discourse, John 13–17), but this sample, mainly from Matthew, suffices to make the case that realisation of sonship in those "to whom the Son [chose] to reveal [the Father]" (Matt 11:27) was indeed present in—even central to—Jesus's own understanding of his mission. Sonship was not an idea foisted upon Jesus by Paul. This conclusion becomes even more certain when we consider Jesus's teaching (both explicit and suggestive) against the background of the Old Testament motif of sonship—which undoubtedly provides background to perhaps his most beloved parable: that of the gracious Father and his two wayward sons in Luke 15.

The penultimate scene of Act 3 takes place at the cross, where Jesus shed his blood “for our sins” (1 Cor 15:3). The link between Jesus’s mission with respect to sin and with respect to sonship is also confirmed beyond the Pauline corpus by the writer of Hebrews, who affirms that Jesus’s sacrifice of his blood was “so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15) in which the notion of inheritance brings us again into the realm of sonship. The cross is the high point of Jesus’s mission. It is at the cross that he gives himself “as a sin offering” (Rom 8:3). It is at the cross that he, as one “born under the law” (Gal 4:4), bore the curse of the law “for us” (Gal 3:13), thereby redeeming those under the law so that they could receive adoption as sons (Gal 4:5). That Paul stresses Jesus’s birth “of woman” (Gal 4:4) is significant. Again, this statement has its parallel in Romans 8:3 in that Jesus is said to have been sent “in the likeness of sinful flesh” to accomplish his mission. It is because of the “full participation of the Son in the human condition ... that [he] possesses the necessary requirement to act as our substitute” (Moo 1996, 479). Thus, as a man (i.e., in his humanity), Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father in his life and in his death and secured the adoption of all God’s elect.

In the final scene we see an angel rolling a large stone aside and Jesus, risen from the dead, striding out of the tomb in which he had three days earlier been laid. A new age has dawned. The Son of God has defeated death itself, and all those united by faith to the Son are victors over death together with him. The full realisation of this future hope—the redemption of our bodies—Paul identifies as the consummation of adoption (Rom 8:23). All that was lost in Eden, and even all that was foreshadowed in Eden, is secured by the cross and the resurrection of Christ. The full experience of sonship must yet wait a while, but its purchase is complete.

But, just as adoption was not automatic upon the Son’s incarnation, so it is not automatic upon his sacrifice and his triumph. Rather, it is received by faith. This is the main thrust of Paul’s argument in Galatians 3 and 4 and gives context to Paul’s use of his adoption metaphor in that letter. Just as Abraham (in Act 2) received God’s promise by faith (Gal 3:6), so too “those who are *of faith* are blessed along with Abraham” (Gal 3:9, emphasis added). Just as Abraham’s faith was in God’s promise confirmed by the covenant ceremonies described in Genesis 15 and 17, so too faith now must be in God’s promise confirmed by the covenant ceremony of the cross (cf. Heb 9). In fact,

God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 reaches its fulfilment only in Christ. As Paul explains, the inheritance (i.e., restoration to right relationship with God, namely sonship) does not come by law but rather by trusting in God's promise (Gal 3:18). Thus Paul concludes that "in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (Gal 3:26), where the fact that sonship is that which is obtained confirms our relational understanding of the inheritance promised to Abraham, and that fact that it is "in Christ ... through faith" confirms that it is not automatic. Paul's phrase ἐν Χριστῷ (in Christ, Gal 3:14), though rich in theological significance, "has no uniform function but rather expresses a wide range of ideas or relationships" (*NIDNTTE*, 2:194). Specific connotations must be inferred from the context. Moo (2013, 215) says the phrase in this instance is locative, not instrumental, but offers no defence of this assertion. With characteristic clarity Stott explains that, as "God acted *in Christ* for our salvation, ... so we must be *in Christ* to receive it" (Stott 1968, 82, emphasis original). We enter this personal and vital union by faith, that is, by "laying hold of Jesus Christ personally" (*ibid.*).

We may now expand our understanding of adoption a little further.

The relationship man was created for as an image-bearer of God, made in his likeness, was as son to Father. This created relationship was forfeited through sin in Eden in Act 1 but, though only judgement was expected, in grace God promised a restored relationship in Act 2. This promise came first to Abram and was reiterated to Israel throughout its history. In addition to his promises, God continued to treat Israel with paternal care which, at times, included discipline of the nation through his chosen agents. God's grace did not obviate the need for justice, though, and ever since the promise was given the audience has wondered not only how and when true sonship would be restored, but also how God would deal with the guilt of sin. But guilt was not the only issue for, as the history of Israel illustrated, sin had done more than produce objective guilt in the judicial sense—it had also so marred the image of God in man, so corrupted his likeness to God, that he was no longer able to relate to God in the manner he was created to relate.

Act 3 saw God's eternally begotten Son occupy the stage from start to finish. He was announced as the one who would save God's people from sin. Though what exactly that meant was not clear to other actors on stage at the time, against the background

of Acts 1 and 2 we understand that Jesus came both to bear the punishment for the sin of God's elect and to break the power of sin over them so that they could begin to relate rightly—as *adopted* sons—to the Father. Created sonship had been forfeited. Covenantal sonship, gracious gift though it was, was but a poor shadow of the relationship God had created his image-bearers for. Adoptive sonship is the fulfilment of the promise, and Jesus came to secure it. By bearing the sin of God's elect upon himself on the cross, he satisfied the demand for justice. By fully partaking of our human nature—apart from sin, which is a corruption of it and not intrinsic to it—and living in perfect, trusting obedience to the Father as a man, he broke the power of sin and death. Having thus in Christ dealt with both the penalty and the power of sin, the Father has made adoptive sonship possible. Possible, but not automatic. It is only those who are joined by faith in spiritual union to Christ that receive adoption as sons of the Father. The consummate experience of sonship will be realised only in the eschaton (Act 5). Nevertheless, for the adopted, the life of sonship is to be lived now. What exactly does that mean? That is the burden of Act 4.

4.3.5 Act 4: Church

The curtain rises on the same scene that closed Act 3. The Son stands centre stage, with an empty tomb in the background, as he explains to his disciples that he will soon ascend to his Father. The disciples—amazed at the undeniable reality that before them stands and speaks a living man whom, three days prior, they had seen dead with their own eyes—do not fully grasp Jesus's words in describing his Father as “my Father and [their] Father” (John 20:17).¹¹² Both audience and cast wonder how to make sense of Jesus's imminent ascension alongside his assurance that he would be “with [his disciples] always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20). How will Jesus both go back to his Father and be with his disciples at the same time? Jesus himself resolves the mystery, explaining that when he goes he will send the Holy Spirit and that, though it is hard for them to understand why right in this moment, this is for their best (John

112 On the night before his death, Jesus had told his disciples that he would soon return to his Father, who had sent him (cf. John 16:5), but their own status in relationship to the Father was not yet as explicit as Jesus makes it now. The cross and resurrection are the decisive events that secure their adoption as sons of the Father.

16:7). Jesus instructs them to wait for the Holy Spirit's coming, then he blesses them and parts from them—"carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:49–51).

The disciples, now alone on stage, have the good sense to obey Jesus's final instructions to them. And so to a room in Jerusalem they retreat and wait—prayerfully anticipating the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit. They must exercise some patience in their waiting but, when the day of Pentecost dawns, Jesus's promise is fulfilled: "Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind ... and tongues as of fire ... rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:1–4). A new character commands the stage.

There is a difficulty with this new character, though, and it is perfectly illustrated by an anecdote related by Fee. He tells of a children's Sunday School class being taught about the Holy Spirit. It was explained to them that we know the reality of the Spirit in the same way we know the reality of the wind—by its visible effects—even though the wind itself is invisible. At which a six-year-old boy protested, "But I want the wind to be un-invisible!" (Fee 1996, 24). This instinct is exactly right, and the audience wonders just who—or even what—this new character is. Witherington and Ice point out that in the Old Testament the Spirit is referred to impersonally—as "something that can be poured out, something that one can be filled with, a medium one can be baptised in or with" (Witherington and Ice 2002, loc. 1321). John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, is representative of this when he draws an analogy between the Spirit and water (cf. Mark 1:8). By contrast, when speaking of him, Jesus refers to the Spirit as a person. Witherington and Ice highlight the pre- versus post-Pentecost difference in Luke's references to the Holy Spirit. They contend that Luke tends to speak of the Spirit in the Old Testament fashion through his Gospel: the Spirit is a power, presence, or force—but not a person. In contrast, in the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit is "an actor in the drama, so much so that he is one of the persons who hands down the Jerusalem Decree" (*ibid.*, , loc. 1417–1422).¹¹³ Taking Paul's writings as the earliest record of what the church thought of the Holy Spirit, Witherington and Ice point out that Paul "avoids images that imply an impersonal power (e.g., water, oil, wind, fire)

113 Witherington and Ice may be overstating the matter, and it may be better to think of Luke as emphasising the Spirit's activity in metaphorical terms in his Gospel in anticipation of the fuller and more personal manifestation of the Spirit in Acts.

... [and instead stresses] the personal nature of the Spirit” (ibid., loc. 1619). Fee concurs, explaining that Paul’s understanding of the Holy Spirit as a person is confirmed in that he speaks of the agency of the Spirit in the same way he does of the agency of Christ, “whose agency can only be personal” (Fee 1996, 26), and by the fact that the Spirit is the subject of a large number of verbs “that demand a personal agent” (ibid., 27).

Very well—the character commanding the stage is a person, but he is still invisible and, like the young boy, we want him to be “un-invisible.” Paul understands our desire and teaches that the Spirit is made un-invisible precisely in the life of adopted sonship. The whole thrust of Paul’s argument in Galatians 3 and following is that, being united to Christ by faith and having received the Spirit by faith (Gal 3:2–3, 5, 14), believers are now “sons of God” (Gal 3:26) and their lives should increasingly reflect that (cf. Gal 5:16–26). And if his argument is not clear enough, he says it explicitly: “Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal 4:6). The indwelling of the Spirit is more than a doctrine to be affirmed; it is “a dynamically experienced reality in the life of [both] believers ... and [the church]” (Fee 1996, 107). The most basic experience of that reality is the knowledge of God as Father (cf. Gal 4:6), and the outward expression of it (i.e., making it “un-invisible”) is a life visibly in step with the Spirit (Gal 5:16–26). In other words, the life of sonship.

Paul makes this even more explicit in Romans 8, where he teaches that being led by the Spirit is the identifying characteristic of the sons of God (Rom 8:14). What does that look like? How is it made “un-invisible”? By putting to death, by the Spirit, the deeds of the sinful nature (Rom 8:13). Strikingly, Paul names the Spirit “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9). According to Fee, Paul does this to deliberately tie together the work of the Spirit in Chapter 8 with that of Christ in Chapter 6 (Fee 1996, 30). In other words, those indwelt by the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9) are those who—being united to Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom 6:3–5)—walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4), are no longer enslaved to sin (Rom 6:6), are alive to God in Christ (Rom 6:11), and present their earthly lives to God for righteousness (Rom 6:13). Importantly, none of this is based in or energised by self-will. Rather, it is based in the finished work of the Son (Act 3) and our spiritual union with him by faith (Rom 6:5). This spiritual union is made an experiential reality and empowered by the indwelling Spirit—the very “Spirit of

Christ” (Rom 8:9). This is the reason Paul can say that the adopted sons of God, indwelt by the Spirit of Christ, are “predestined to be conformed to the *image* of his Son” (Rom 8:29, emphasis added). The magnitude of this should not be missed. Sin has not had the final word, nor does it belong to the defiant. Instead, the Father’s desire has been realised as both created and covenantal sonship give way to adoptive sonship in which, by the empowering of the Spirit, his chosen adopted are transformed increasingly into the likeness of his only begotten Son. The day will come when our transformation will be complete (1 John 3:2), but even now the project is underway (2 Cor 3:18) and is, by virtue of the Father’s underwriting, certain to succeed (Rom 8:29–30).

We recall from our earlier analysis that it is the very nature of the indwelling Spirit to form sonship—and sonship of a very particular character—from within; for the “Spirit of adoption” (Rom 8:15) is the “Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9). The Spirit both reassures adopted believers of the Father’s paternal love for them and animates the life of sonship within them. The adopted are free from the power of sin that has tyrannised and despoiled God’s image-bearers since the fall. They are no longer slaves to sin but have a new identity and a new power at work within them—they are “[sons of God and] are led by the Spirit of God” (Rom 8:14). Lin (2017, 320) affirms this understanding, arguing that the principal ministry of the “Spirit of adoption” (Rom 8:15) is to help the adopted increasingly realise their new identity as sons of the Father so that they overcome the power of the flesh even as they await the ultimate consummation of their salvation. As such, their greatest desire is to please the Father, just as Jesus did in his earthly life (cf. John 8:29). The life of Spirit-empowered sonship is a life, in other words, lived following in the footsteps of *the* Son.

A corollary of walking in the footsteps of Jesus, though, is that Jesus spent his earthly life walking towards the cross (Matt 20:17–19; Mark 9:30–31; Luke 9:51) in submission to the Father’s will, and following him means all adopted sons must, in a sense, do the same (Matt 16:24; Luke 9:23). This means putting to death remaining sin in our lives (Rom 8:12–17), submitting our wills to the Father’s just as Jesus did (Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42), and understanding that this world is not our home. God’s children will one day be taken home to be with him but, until then, we live in hostile territory. That God’s adopted have been freed from the enslaving power of sin does not mean

that the world (in rebellion against God) is no longer under its power. Jesus himself teaches that the world hates his Father, hates him, and will hate all the Father's adopted sons (John 15:18–25). Following in the footsteps of the Son in this world will attract the hostility of the world and of the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2). The life of adoptive sonship will necessarily include some measure of suffering (Rom 8:17). The adopted are not, however, left to endure in their own strength—the Spirit bears them up in obedience even as they suffer in this world (8:12–17). But this world is not the end of the story; indeed, those in Christ await a new creation (Act 5) that, when they enter it, will make all their present sufferings seem as nothing (8:18–25).

Moreover, the adopted are not alone—they have one another. We noted in our earlier analysis that the Old Testament pointed forward to the LORD's own redeemed people as his inheritance (cf. Deut 4:20; 32:9; Isa 19:25) and that Paul sees this inheritance realised in the saints (cf. Eph 1:18). Thus the adopted, as co-heirs with Christ of his inheritance, are part and parcel of one another's inheritance. As adopted sons (male and female), we belong to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Another perspective confirms the same reality: the coming of the promised Spirit at once made true sonship possible and created the church. Thus the age of the Spirit *is* the age of realised adoptive sonship, *is* the age of the church. These are one and the same reality. The church is no other than the family of God's adopted sons, namely those who are led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14). Thus Act 4 may equally be titled “The Spirit.” However, in view of the Spirit being made un-invisible in the lives of those following in the footsteps of the Son, we believe that Vanhoozer's title “The Church” probably is preferable.

The curtain has not yet fallen on Act 4. The Spirit, made un-invisible in the church, still commands the stage. God's adopted sons still follow in the footsteps of the Son—in trusting (though imperfect) obedience to the Father. Father, Son, and Spirit have intervened decisively in human history to accomplish what they covenanted to accomplish in the *pactum salutis* in Pre-production, namely the creation of a family of sons, growing in likeness to the Son, by adoption. Horton rightly captures the essential thread of the whole drama thus far in saying that “the *imago dei* can be properly defined only in relation to its renewal in Christ by the Spirit” (Horton 2008, 154). Just as an early scene of Act 4 found the disciples waiting for the fulfilment of Jesus's promise to send the Spirit, so the act as a whole finds the church waiting for the fulfilment of his

promise to return (Matt 16:27; 24:42–44; 25:31; 26:64; Mark 8:38; John 14:1–3) and the consummation of all that adoption entails. The great inheritance anticipated by those whose hearts have been made alive in love to the Father is their glorification (Rom 8:29–30)—not for its own sake, but so that, as Calvin noted, we shall at last “have eyes prepared to see God” (Calvin 2010b, 206).

Though Act 4 is still in progress, when the curtain does fall it will be to the Son’s return in triumphant glory. The adopted will enter into his inheritance with him (Matt 25:24), and those who have persisted in rebellion against him will be sent away to eternal punishment (Matt 25:41, 46). Whereas all that has happened on stage prior to this point is a matter of historical record or current experience, the Son’s return and what lies beyond it are not. Nevertheless, we do have the script and know some of what Act 5 holds for us. Let us, therefore, anticipate what awaits.

4.3.6 Act 5: The eschaton

The curtain rises on a landscape that looks familiar, yet the audience senses that something is different: all signs of death and decay are gone. It is difficult to describe, but the whole created order seems visibly to be rejoicing in a long-awaited freedom and fullness (Rom 8:19–22). God’s adopted sons too, though we recognise one another from earlier in the drama, are *transformed*. Our physical bodies have been redeemed. They are, like the landscape around us, free from the bondage to corruption that characterised our previous sojourn (Rom 8:23). We feel the glorious strength of imperishability (1 Cor 15:50–57).

Our souls likewise feel the joy of being truly and fully conformed to the moral likeness of the Son (1 John 3:2) by the Spirit whose full indwelling we had previously known only in token measure (Rom 8:23). The old nature that constantly pulled us away from the Father and towards sin, and against which we wrestled continually, is no longer. We no longer think, feel, or even imagine anything contrary to the nature of true and faithful sonship. Not only are all sinful propensities absent, but our thoughts and desires are fully attuned to the pleasure of the Father and we experience happiness in a degree we had previously not even been able to imagine as we now live in perfect accord with his pleasure.

Those now on stage number a great multitude beyond counting—adopted sons from every nation of the earth (Rev 7:9). Yet, for all the variety of physical characteristics they possess, every single one is characterised most essentially by their love for the Father and their joy in what pleases him. Because of this, all strife, enmity, hardness of heart, envy, pride, deceit—and every other form of discord that plagued human relations since the fall—is no more. God’s adopted sons now live together in the perfect unity that was foreshadowed (however imperfectly) in their communal life together in Act 4 (Eph 5:1–2).

As if these transformations of body, soul, and community were not enough, the greatest of all our joys is not so much in these as in what our glorified state finally enables: that we dwell in the presence of the Father and look upon his glory, and the glory of the Son, with pure hearts and eyes made ready (Ps 16:11; Matt 5:8; John 17:24; Rev 21:3; 22:4). This is the inheritance of the sons of God (Eph 1:14). The Father’s desire has been realised—his great purpose accomplished: he has brought his adopted sons home (John 17:2–3) and, in doing so, magnified the glory of his grace (Eph 1:6). And, just as the sun did not set on the seventh day in Eden, so the curtain shall never fall on Act 5.

4.4 Conclusion

Our objective in this chapter has been to answer our third subsidiary question by presenting the soteriological accomplishment of adoption in such a way as faithfully captures the major emphases we noted in our exegetical and historical analyses, and that lends itself to the enterprise of Christian spiritual formation. To that end we have adopted (and slightly adapted) Vanhoozer’s (2005) theo-dramatic metaphor. In six Acts spanning the pre-temporal to the coming eschatological eras, we have shown how adoption fits into “the heavenly Father’s unrelenting determination to create a family for himself” (Garner 2016, 254); namely, that adoption is the soteriological accomplishment by which sonship is achieved and the image of God in man renewed through Christ by the Spirit. Though adoption per se appeared on stage only in Act 3, with the coming of the Son, its accomplishment was already in view in the *pactum salutis* and it remains the consummate expression of salvation that the eschaton anticipates.

Our presentation remains true to the doctrinal emphases we found in Paul and that were faithfully transmitted through the best treatments in the history of the church. In particular we sought to highlight: (1) the protological-to-eschatological sweep of adoption, and (a slightly adapted version of) Vanhoozer's theo-dramatic model served well to that end; (2) the Pauline perspective on adoption as the apex of salvific accomplishment by emphasising, as the central thrust of our drama, the Father's resolve to glorify his own grace in the accomplishment of sonship by adoption; (3) the inherently transformative nature of salvation-as-adoption by emphasising the inward formation of true and faithful sonship (i.e., Christlikeness) in the adopted; (4) the ministry of the Spirit of adoption as both the effector of this transformation and the nurturer of a filial relationship with the Father as conjoined emphases; and (5) the united purpose of the persons of the Trinity in the *pactum salutis* and in its fulfilment through their complementary roles in the accomplishment of adoption.

Though other ways of presenting the doctrine of adoption have their strengths, we believe our presentation effectively serves the objective of this study, which is to probe the implications of the doctrine for Christian spiritual formation.¹¹⁴ That is the endeavour of Chapter 5, to which we now come.

114 It is not our contention that other ways of presenting doctrine *cannot* aid the enterprise of Christian spiritual formation, merely that Vanhoozer's approach seems particularly well suited to the task (cf. Hwang 2016, "Storytelling and Spiritual Formation," as an additional advocate for a narrative-style theology). Kopic, for example, offers an excellent defence of the role of early church creeds and confessions (i.e., largely propositional presentations of doctrine) in spiritual formation (cf. Kopic 2014, "Systematic Theology and Spiritual Formation").

CHAPTER 5

THE DOCTRINE OF ADOPTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

5.1 *Introduction*

This chapter seeks to answer the fourth and final subsidiary question of this study, namely: In what ways might current thought relating to Christian spiritual formation benefit from a deeper appreciation of the Trinitarian accomplishment of adoption? In Chapter 1 we voiced concern over an imbalanced soteriology—one that has become so dominated by forensic considerations of guilt and justification as to meaningfully minimise the inherently transformative nature of salvation in Christ. The doctrine of justification ought not to be diminished, but Ferguson rightly reminds us that “Scripture provides us with various models [of salvation], of which justification is but one” (Ferguson 2017, 586). Against this background, and recognising the essential connection between the content of our soteriology and our progress (or lack thereof) in Christian spiritual formation, this study set out to explore the implications of the soteriological doctrine of adoption for Christian spiritual formation.¹¹⁵

Our study began with an analysis of Paul’s five uses of the metaphor of adoption in his letters to the Galatian, Ephesian, and Roman churches in Chapter 2. This was followed by an analysis of the treatment and uses of the doctrine of adoption through the history of the church in Chapter 3. We distilled five major emphases in the Pauline

115 Note that it is not our contention that soteriology alone matters for spiritual formation. We agree with Graham (2014), who makes the more general case that all theological doctrine is inherently formative. Furthermore, not only is theological *doctrine* formative, but theological *inquiry* is likewise inherently formative. Contra the epistemological assumptions of the Enlightenment (i.e., that true knowledge is detached, objective, and abstract), which precipitated the sundering of theology and spiritual formation (Graham 2014, 186), Allen rightly says, “there is no detached knowing of God” (Allen 1997, 154).

presentation of the doctrine and found that the best historical treatments faithfully transmitted these—though, regrettably, the doctrine largely faded into the shadows of soteriological reflection post-Calvin. In Chapter 4 we submitted a presentation of the doctrine styled according to Vanhoozer’s theo-dramatic proposal that we hope, by remaining faithful to the key doctrinal emphases highlighted in Chapters 3 and 4, could provide sound dramaturgical direction to those seeking to participate fittingly in the great theo-drama.¹¹⁶ It remains only to explicitly relate the doctrine of adoption to the goal of Christian spiritual formation.

To this end we need both an understanding of the constitution of the human self and of the dynamics of the formation of that self. Furthermore, as our interest is specifically in *Christian* spiritual formation, we need a distinctly *Christian* understanding of these things. We require, in other words, a theological anthropology to which we can relate the doctrine of adoption. As the provider of such an anthropology we select Dallas Willard, and our chapter begins with a defence of this selection. This will be followed by an overview of Willard’s theological anthropology, in which he details the six basic aspects of the human self and proposes an understanding of how they relate one to another. Following this preparatory work, the bulk of the chapter will be given to exploring the implications of the soteriological accomplishment of adoption for Christian spiritual formation.

5.2 *Why Willard?*

Several of the authors we have already encountered in our study have at least hinted at the potential for the doctrine of adoption to inform our understanding of Christian spiritual formation. Lin, for example, says that the Spirit of adoption is always at work in the believer’s life, “*incentivizing appropriate behaviour by profound identity recognition*” (Lin 2017, 322, emphasis original). Garner says that the believer’s union with Christ by the indwelling “Spirit of adoption” (Rom 8:15) is “not merely conceptual, but ... existentially formative” (Garner 2016, 109). Packer implies the formative

116 The fact that Vanhoozer was invited to contribute a chapter to a book celebrating the life and work of the late Dallas Willard suggests that the potential for Vanhoozer’s theo-dramatic model to serve the goal of Christian spiritual formation may be gaining recognition (cf. Vanhoozer 2018).

implications of the metaphor of adoption when he says that “*the entire Christian life has to be understood in terms of it*” (2004, 236, emphasis original).

Citations along the lines of the above could be multiplied. Regrettably, however, works that go further than mere acknowledgement of a relationship between adoption and spiritual formation are very few—perhaps even non-existent.¹¹⁷ Even McKnight, in his recent work on the apostle Paul’s understanding of pastoral ministry as having essentially to do with spiritual formation, fails to connect the two. He rightly recognises Christoformity as the aim of redemption (McKnight 2019, 77) and argues that it is not inevitable in the Christian life, cannot be attained by mere intention and willpower, and is possible only by the Spirit (ibid., 193). Yet, after such promising preparatory argumentation, his only employment of the metaphor of adoption is to the end that believers are made members of the new family of God (ibid., 77). Similarly, Fee explains that at conversion believers are “invaded by the living God himself, in the person of his Spirit, whose goal is to infect us thoroughly with God’s own likeness” (Fee 1996, 112) but then, notwithstanding his use of the language of “God’s own likeness,” goes on to expound this in terms of the fruit of the Spirit and not in terms of adoption to sonship.

Garner (2016, 254–255) appreciates the doctrinal importance of adoption, arguing that Paul’s entire theological structure—his understanding of covenant and of the first-and-second-Adam paradigm, his Christ-centeredness, and the eschatological and pneumatological entailments thereof—all rely on the filial framework realised ultimately in adoption. Thus, says Garner, “covenant history is filial history” (ibid., 262) and “adoption is eschatology” (ibid., 263). Garner’s appreciation does not end at doctrinal considerations, though, as he says that adoption expresses “the consummate purpose of God in redemption, [namely] the thorough renovation of the redeemed sons of Adam” (ibid., 269). Promising as Garner’s recognition of the existential implications of the doctrine is, it remains undeveloped.

Millar (2021, 222–223) opens his chapter titled “Changed into his likeness” with a biblical theology of personal transformation that parallels our theo-dramatic presentation of the doctrine of adoption yet fails to bring the notion of adoption, or of

117 At least, this study has not discovered any works that meaningfully develop the relationship.

sonship, to bear. Millar (*ibid.*, 225) subsequently states that it is by adoption that believers become sons and daughters of God and learn to live Christlike lives in step with the Spirit—yet this promising acknowledgement of the relationship between adoptive sonship and spiritual formation remains undeveloped.

Heim (2014, 215–240) goes further than the aforementioned in arguing that Paul intended his adoption metaphor to create a cognitive structure with vertical, horizontal, and temporal dimensions. In the vertical and horizontal dimensions, adoption defines our relationships to God and to other believers. In the temporal dimension, adoption produces a sense of displacement, in that believers have been “transferred into the age of the Spirit, which means that they in some sense perceive their existence according to the age to come. ... [Yet] they simultaneously perceive that they are still awaiting the full expression of that transfer” (*ibid.*, 221). Key for Heim is that these realities are not merely propositional, but are profoundly and existentially experienced. This occurs for believers as their own thought-worlds are “*taken over*” (*ibid.*, 228, emphasis original) by the reality described in the Scriptures and they come to find their own identity therein.¹¹⁸ Heim explains further that, as they identify as the adopted sons of God described in the relevant texts, so their own emotions are taken on the roller coaster ride of the argument. They are, and feel the corresponding despair and fear of, those who were slaves (Rom 8:12–15). The emotional experience of slavery and death in these verses is contrasted with the joy of sonship, life, and a relationship with the Father, to whom they may cry out for rescue. Similarly, Paul contrasts the sufferings of the present (Rom 8:17–18) with the glory that will soon be known (Rom 8:18), and the groaning of the present with the eager expectation and assurance of coming redemption (Rom 8:23). On this roller coaster of emotions, the metaphor of adoption is the vehicle in which the audience ‘sits’ and experiences both the steep plunges of despair and the soaring heights of hope. In this way—by profound emotional identification—the metaphor exerts formative power. Yet even Heim does not develop the formative implications of the metaphor. Though this was not the ambition of Heim’s thesis, it is ours, and we will make best progress by following in the footsteps of a

118 Heim demonstrates that metaphors are more than mere conduits of information; they are “powerful and active agents ... capable of altering and influencing the perceptions of the hearer/reader” (Heim 2014, 215).

trusted scholar who has explored—even mapped—the landscape of Christian spiritual formation.

Porter (2018, 21–23), in his opening essay to *Until Christ is Formed in You* (Porter, Moon, and Moreland, 2018), says that the writings of Dallas Willard (1935–2013), considered as a corpus, provide a thorough, coherent, and theologically robust account of the nature and means of Christian formation. Issler likewise recognises Willard’s substantial contribution to the careful study of spiritual formation, going so far as to say that pastors and Christian educators “will need to restructure [their] ministry practices” in light of it (Issler 2004, 164). Furthermore, and critically for our purposes, we have discovered no proposals for a theological anthropology that approach the comprehensiveness and coherence of Willard’s.¹¹⁹ Moon (2018, 243) concurs, stating that Willard’s model surpasses anything offered by modern psychology. Willard is thus a suitable interlocutor as we move toward the conclusion of our study.

5.3 *Willard’s understanding of the human self and Christian spiritual formation*

5.3.1 Introducing *Renovation* and Willard’s definition of Christian spiritual formation

Porter’s (2018, 19–52) essay provides an analysis of the Willardian corpus in which he distils the central features of Willard’s understanding of spiritual formation—an analysis that he hopes will pave the way for other scholars seeking to understand the nature and means of Christian spiritual formation.¹²⁰ It is beyond the scope of this study to engage with the entire Willardian corpus. Instead, our focus shall be the penultimate work of this pentalogy, namely *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of*

119 Chapter 2 of Millar, “On Being ‘Us’: Biblical Anthropology and Personal Transformation” (Millar 2021, 29–55), arguably comes closest to Willard. In fact, one way in which Millar surpasses Willard is in his careful analysis of the range of words translated “soul” (or similar) in the Old Testament, and in relating these to both Hebraic and Platonic models of the self (cf. *ibid.*, 36–50). Yet, while Millar reaches some carefully nuanced philosophical/theological conclusions regarding the *nature* of the self (i.e., Is the human self best expressed in holistic dualism, dualistic holism, substance dualism, integrative dualism, or Christian Aristotelian Platonism?), he lacks a model expressing the *functional interrelationships* of the aspects/parts of the human self and its relationship to others to which we may relate the doctrine of adoption.

120 Although Willard wrote extensively, by the Willardian corpus Porter, Moon, and Moreland mean the five books that constitute his sustained reflection on the topic of Christian spiritual formation. These are, in chronological order, as follows: *In Search of Guidance: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (1984); *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (1988); *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (1997); *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (2002); and *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* (2009).

Christ, in which Willard presents his theological anthropology. According to Porter (ibid., 46–47), it is fairly typical of other treatments of Christian spiritual formation that they leave key terms such as “soul,” “mind,” “flesh,” “spirit,” “will,” “heart,” and “character” undefined—let alone provide any account of how these aspects of the human self interrelate in the process of spiritual formation. It is precisely these sorts of issues that Willard addresses in *Renovation*. Issler concurs, identifying *Renovation* as Willard’s “most practical and comprehensive guidance” in the enterprise of Christian spiritual formation (Issler 2004, 160). A brief orientation to *Renovation* will be helpful before we seek to relate Willard’s understanding of Christian spiritual formation to the Pauline doctrine of adoption.

Early in *Renovation*, Willard (2002, 19) describes spiritual formation generally as the process by which the human self is given form or character. This general definition is given specific Christian character later when Willard says:

Spiritual transformation into Christlikeness ... is the process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it takes on the character of the inner being of Jesus himself. The result is that the “outer” life of the individual increasingly becomes a natural expression of the inner reality of Jesus and of his teachings. Doing what he said and did increasingly becomes a part of who we are (Willard 2002, 159).¹²¹

5.3.2 The basic aspects of the human self and their interrelationships

Following these definitions, Willard makes clear his holistic perspective on spiritual formation by detailing, as he understands them, the “six basic aspects” (2002, 30) of the human person. These are:

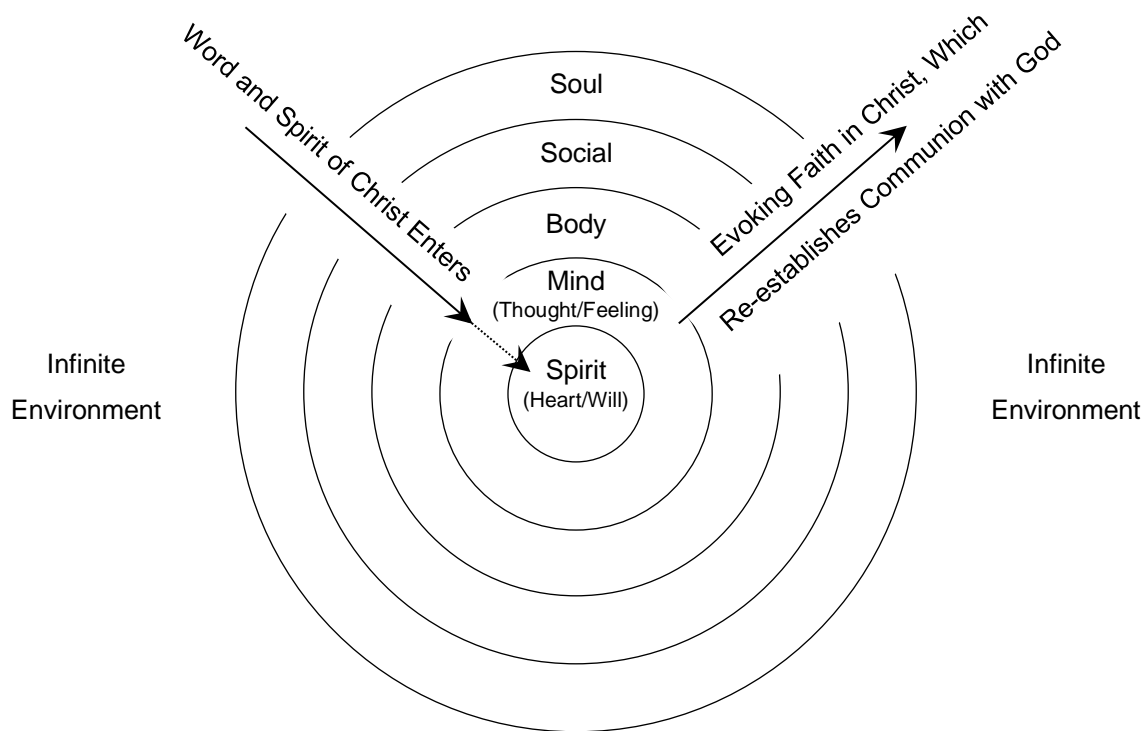
121 It is worth noting that there is nothing novel in Willard’s understanding of Christian spiritual formation. Fairburn, for example, explains that, on the basis of our union with Christ, believers “begin more and more to reflect *his* character” (Fairburn 2009, 207, emphasis added). Calvin expresses essentially the same understanding of the matter when he says that the Father has “stamped [believers] for the likeness [of Christ] to which he would have us conform” (Calvin 1960, 3.6.3) and that it is inherent in the nature of our adoption that “our [lives] express Christ” (ibid.; cf. 1.15.4).

- (1) Thought (images, concepts, judgements, inferences)
- (2) Feeling (sensation, emotion)
- (3) Choice (will, decision, character)
- (4) Body (action, interaction with the physical world)
- (5) Social context (personal and structural relations with others)
- (6) Soul (the factor that integrates all of the above to form one life)

Willard (*ibid.*, 31) explains that every human being thinks, feels, makes choices or decisions, has a physical body, exists in a social context, and (successfully or otherwise) integrates all of these into one life. This is depicted in Figure 5.1 (Willard 2002, 38) below with further commentary thereunder.¹²²

122 Note that the outermost circle (i.e., Soul) corresponds to Willard's sixth aspect of the human self (i.e., Soul in the list above), and likewise for the circles labelled 'Social' and 'Body'. The two innermost circles, namely 'Mind' and 'Spirit', correspond to the first, second, and third aspects in the list (i.e., to Thought, Feeling, and Choice). Though the sequence of these aspects in the list and in the diagram appears inconsistent, Willard's logic will become clear as we proceed.

Figure 5.1
Willard's depiction of the Human Self



Willard (2002, 38–39) explains that the inner circles in this diagram are not meant to exclude the outer, but rather to incorporate them in part. In other words, the inner circles are superimposed on the outer without exhausting them. Willard explains that there is more to the mind than to the spirit (heart/will) even though the spirit intermingles with the mind. Likewise, there is more to the body than the mind even though body and mind intermingle, and so on. All six aspects of the self, Willard (*ibid.*, 15) argues, are involved in spiritual formation. Formation in Christlikeness has primarily to do with the renovation of the human heart/spirit, but it embraces the whole person and not only the heart. Energised by personal relationship with God in Christ, formation proceeds from the heart but, as it proceeds, it changes the believer's "ideas, beliefs, feelings, and habits of choice, as well as their bodily tendencies and social relations."¹²³

123 Cepero expands on the believer's relationship with God as the necessary foundation of spiritual formation. She carefully distinguishes between the ideas inherent in the common language of 'living *for* God' and the less common language of 'living *with* God' and argues that it is "engagement *with* God—in our prayer, in our action, in our leisure, in our relationships ... in all things—that will form us in Christ" (Cepero 2006, 223, emphasis original).

It penetrates to the deepest layers of their soul” (ibid.). Spiritual formation in Christ is, in other words, holistic.

Before we can understand the dynamics of spiritual formation, however, we must first know how Willard understood the aspects of the human self as listed above and illustrated in Figure 5.1. Drawing on both the Judeo-Christian and classical Greek tradition, Willard sees that “heart,” “spirit,” and “will” refer to one and the same thing, namely the “fundamental component of the person” (2002, 29), but he argues that they denote different aspects of that fundamental component. “Spirit” denotes its non-physical nature, “heart” describes its position as the centre of the self, to which every other component owes its proper functioning, and “will” describes its power to initiate or create. For Willard, it is this fundamental component that directs the human life from within.¹²⁴

The mind is that component of the human self in which “thought” and “feeling” occur. Thought “brings things before our minds ... and enables us to consider them” (Willard 2002, 32). Feeling “inclines us toward or away from things that come before our minds in thought” (ibid.). Thus thought and feeling are always interdependent. There is no feeling apart from something being brought before the mind in thought, and no thought without some measure of either positive or negative feeling toward the object under consideration.¹²⁵ Thought and feeling are intimately interdependent, such that the mind may rightly be conceived of as consisting of thought and feeling together (ibid., 33). Furthermore, just as thought and feeling are inseparably intertwined, so too volition (i.e., the will) is intertwined with them. Volition can only be exercised in respect of some thing (i.e., an object or idea) held before the mind in thought and some feeling for or against it (ibid., 34). Thus Porter (2018, 47) rightly observes that, in the Willardian model, though the will ought to govern the mind, it is also largely subject to it. Porter explains: “The will [by choosing what to bring before the mind for contemplation] has some power over what is thought and felt, but once particular thoughts and feelings are fostered in the mind, the will eventually succumbs to their directionality” (ibid.,

124 Willard (2002, 30) acknowledges that the whole person does not always actually do precisely as the heart directs, any more than an organisation actually does precisely as the boss directs. Nevertheless, the ideal stands and the whole life is coherent to the extent that it follows the direction of the heart.

125 Willard (2002, 33) explains that indifference is simply a very low degree of feeling, which is usually negative.

48).¹²⁶ Choices are then “outsourced” to the body in its social context where, over time, they become matters of habit that manifest “more or less automatically,” without further conscience consideration (Willard 2002, 35). Willard recognises that this capacity of the body (i.e., as the vehicle through which we actuate our choices in our physical and social contexts) means that it can be “re-formed to become our ally in Christlikeness” (ibid., 36). In fact, Willard goes so far as to say that Christlikeness cannot be achieved unless the body is transformed in this way.

Willard goes on to explain that, as an ontological fact, the human self “requires rootedness in others” (Willard 2002, 36). Furthermore, because the primary social relationship of every human self is to God, every other social relationship can be right only to the extent that we see others in their relation to God (ibid.). We live rightly, in other words, only when our relationships to God and others are as they ought to be. Willard’s (ibid., 37) holistic perspective again comes to the fore in his reasoning that it is in and through the body that these relationships exist, and that the social aspect of the human self is likewise inseparable from the mind (i.e., thought and feeling) and spirit (i.e., heart and will) aspects.

Finally, Willard describes the soul as that aspect of the person that “interrelates all of the other dimensions so that they form one life” (Willard 2002, 37; cf. 199). It is, says Willard, “like a meta-dimension [of the person] ... because its direct field of play consists of the other dimensions (thought, body, and so on), and through them it reaches ever deeper into the person’s vast environment of God and his creation” (ibid.). In other words, given that all of the other dimensions of the self are interdependent, the soul is that aspect which holds together and harmonises the rest (ibid., 204). Importantly for Willard, the soul operates largely without conscious supervision but can nevertheless—by exercise of the will and only with God’s help—be “redirected and re-formed” (ibid., 38; cf. Willard 1998, 107–108).¹²⁷

126 Porter’s observation is supported by the fact that in *Renovation* Willard’s two chapters on the transformation of the mind (i.e., thought and feeling) precede his chapter on the transformation of the will.

127 This is why the Bible sometimes addresses the soul in the third person (e.g., the Psalmist asks, “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God” (Ps 42:5).)

This brief orientation to Willardian anthropology has equipped us with an understanding of the dynamics of spiritual formation.¹²⁸ We will engage further with Willard as we seek to develop some implications of the doctrine of adoption for spiritual formation in the following section. Before we do so, however, one last preparatory gleaning from Willard is necessary; namely, that formation in Christlikeness is not automatic for the believer.

5.3.3 Christian spiritual formation and the VIM framework

Willard (2002, 91) traces the (usual) lack of growth in Christlikeness among professing Christians not to the impossibility of transformation but to lack of the vision of Christlikeness and the intention to attain to it. In remedy Willard (2002, 85) proposes the “VIM” framework, in which the letters stand for “Vision,” “Intention,” and “Means”, respectively. This framework will inform some of our later considerations, but we note simply for now Willard’s position that without a clear vision of Christlikeness (i.e., “vision” in VIM), a firm resolve (i.e., “intention” in VIM) to conform as closely as possible to that vision, and the proper use of the God-given means (i.e., “means” in VIM) to achieve it, “Christ simply will not be formed in us” (ibid.). Of course, the other side of the coin is that—with clear vision and firm intention, and by use of proper means—formation in Christlikeness is not only possible; it is, for Willard, “an inescapable fact” (ibid., 82).

5.4 *Relating Willardian spiritual formation to the Pauline doctrine of adoption*

We proceed now to relate the Pauline doctrine of adoption to Willard’s “six basic aspects” (2002, 30) of the human person.¹²⁹

128 It should be noted that others have proposed slight tweaks to Willard’s anthropology. Moreland, for example, while agreeing with much of Willard’s model, proposes a different understanding of the nature and role of the soul in the human person (cf. Moreland 2000). A detailed engagement with Moreland’s proposal is beyond the scope of this study, however, and would nevertheless leave us wanting for a comprehensive model of the human self. Willard’s model is appropriate to our purposes, among other reasons already stated, precisely for its whole-orbed grasp of the human self.

129 Though Millar (2021) approaches the enterprise of Christian spiritual formation differently than does Willard, thus making a direct comparison of their respective proposals less than straightforward, some aspects of Millar’s proposal will be helpful to our study. In particular, Millar (2021, 144–163) devotes a section of his work to spiritual formation in the writings of Paul—in which Paul, according to Millar, describes ten aspects of change. In our view, Millar’s ten aspects are both faithfully Pauline and helpfully presented—even if the distinctions between some of them

5.4.1 Adoption and the transformation of the mind, 1: Thought

Willard (2002, 95) echoes the apostle Paul's exhortation regarding the "renewal of [the] mind" in Romans 12:2, arguing that "as we first turned away from God in our thoughts, so it is in our thoughts that the first movements toward the renovation of the heart occur."¹³⁰ But what precisely is entailed in the renewal of the mind? In answering this question, we recall first that Willard (*ibid.*, 96) distinguishes between the mind's capacity for "thought" and for "feeling"—the former being primary and determinative, and the latter being secondary and responsive to the former. Thought, then, will be our first focus, with feeling following in the next section.

Willard (2002, 96) explains that the realm of thought involves four main factors, namely ideas, images, information, and the ability to think. Ideas are general assumptions about reality and are so pervasive that they often go unnoticed, or at least unexamined. They begin to form in our early years and arise from the teachings, expectations, and behaviours of family and community. Interestingly, Willard says that for all their importance, ideas are "*never* capable of definition or precise specification" (2002, 97, *emphasis original*). This is because ideas are broad, always evolving in relation to their sociohistorical context, and are simply assumed to align accurately with reality. That being so, it is difficult for most people to recognise either the fact that certain ideas govern their lives or, if they do recognise them, exactly how they govern their lives. By way of example, Willard (2002, 97) points to modern American culture's idea of success as having largely to do with career promotion and financial accumulation—the fact that this is 'true' simply requires no justification or even consideration. We will shortly move on to consider images, information, and the ability to think, but let us

seem very subtle. What Millar does not do, that Willard does, is propose a comprehensive model of the self and the interrelationships of its parts (i.e., something akin to the six basic aspects in Willard's model). Nevertheless, we will footnote Millard's observations as they bear upon each aspect of the self on our Willardian path.

130 It is noteworthy that Millar (2021, 152) opens his discussion on one of the ten aspects of change, namely "Learning to discern the will of God," by citing Rom 12:1–2. "We are changed," Millar asserts, "through our mind" (*ibid.*, 154). Millar explains that believers are no longer bound to the destructive patterns of thought described in Rom 1, but their "thought patterns ... are slowly but surely aligned with those of the Lord Jesus" (*ibid.*, 153). Millar's argument corresponds exactly with Willard's, namely that it is by the alignment of our thoughts with God's truth that transformation begins in the human self.

pause to explore some possible implications of the doctrine of adoption for the realm of ideas in the thought of the believer.

We begin by asking what the ideas are that consciously or unconsciously govern peoples' lives with respect to their relationship to God. Packer (2004, 227–228) says that Old Testament religion was dominated by the twin ideas of God's holiness and man's sinfulness. Controlled by these ideas, man's right response was to know his place and to abase himself in God's presence while gratefully sheltering under promises of mercy. Packer may be oversimplifying the case, for surely the Old Testament is rich in evidence of God's love, grace, and compassion towards his covenant people. Even so, Packer is right to highlight that the twin realities of God's holiness and man's unholiness are among the dominant ideas, not just of the Old Testament, but of human experience (cf. Rom 2:15). In contrast, Packer asserts that the whole of New Testament religion is summed up in the idea of the Fatherhood of God. Packer expands:

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. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his ... whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all (Packer 2004, 226).

In the latter part of the above quote, Packer seems to make use of what Willard calls "idea grip" (Willard 2002, 97)—the notion that people live in the grip of ideas. The essence of Packer's claim is that experiential Christianity entails release from the grip of the idea that one's relationship to God is determined solely with reference to God's holiness and one's own sinfulness, and entails being gripped instead by the idea that the relationship is one of Father to child.¹³¹

Packer's assessment accords well with what we learn from the letters in which the apostle Paul employs his adoption metaphors. In Romans, all mankind is in the grip of the idea of imminent judgement—whether that grip is exerted through the Mosaic Law

¹³¹ In the context in which Packer makes this assertion (cf. Packer 2004, 225–260), it is clear that he understands the Father-to-child relationship as a relationship in Christ, and thus one that does not exist apart from the atoning work of Christ.

or through the agency of conscience (Rom 2:12–16; 3:9–19). Some, specifically those who receive by faith the propitiatory death of Christ in their stead (Rom 3:23–25), are declared just in God’s sight. Being thus released from the grip of fear, they have peace with God (Rom 5:1). But the end of the story is not mere release from the grip of fear of deserved judgement. The climax of that part of Paul’s argument comes several chapters later, in which it is explained that those set free from the fear of judgement now stand in a new relationship to God, namely as *adopted sons* who, far from fearing judgement, now cry out to God as *Father* for help in their ongoing quest to put to death the remaining sins of their flesh (Rom 8:12–15). Indeed, God himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit, assures them inwardly of the reality of this new relationship (Rom 8:16). It is not our objective here to restate our exegesis of Chapter 2, but rather to highlight that the most foundational *idea* that holds every human (whether they acknowledge it or not) in its grip—namely their understanding of their relationship to God—has to do with whether they are a condemned rebel before a holy Judge or an adopted son of a holy Father. The same idea shift is evident in the immediate context of the adoption metaphor in Galatians: “So you are no longer a slave [to the Law, and thus under the curse of the Law], but a son, and ... heir [of] God” (Gal 4:7; cf. Gal 3:10). Likewise in Ephesians, the primary shift is from being “sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2) to sons by adoption through Christ (Eph 1:5).

Without recapitulating it in detail, we propose that our theo-dramatic presentation of the doctrine of adoption in Chapter 4 captures all of the main ideas by which a Christian should, increasingly, be gripped. In Pre-production our ideas of the ultimate *ground* and *purpose* of all things are shaped, namely the display of the glory of the Father’s grace in the election of sons to adoption. Act 1 (creation and fall) supplies content to such ideas as *the nature and state of man* (i.e., that he is made in God’s image and for a relationship with God, but that image has been marred by sin and the relationship broken) and *the nature and state of the world* (i.e., created very good but now in bondage to death and decay). Act 2 (Israel) further fills out our ideas of *grace* and of *God’s commitment to the accomplishment of his purposes*, while also amply illustrating the reality of *man’s fallen state*. In Act 3 (Jesus) our notions of *God’s justice and mercy* are brought to their climax at the cross as God’s elect are reconciled to him, and adopted as sons, through the sacrifice of Christ. Act 4 (Church) introduces and develops the idea that the adopted not only enjoy a new status as sons, but also may

be transformed inwardly by the indwelling Holy Spirit such that they increasingly take on the likeness of Christ. Act 5 (Eschaton) gives us glimpses of the *consummation* of all these ideas.

Willard (2002, 98) says that Christian spiritual formation has to do with recognising the false idea systems operative in our own minds and replacing them with the idea system that Jesus both embodied and taught.¹³² As we have already argued, Jesus both perfectly embodied the idea of sonship and taught his followers how to live as sons of the Father themselves. Thus we propose that the idea system expressed in our theo-dramatic presentation of the doctrine of adoption is well suited to the enterprise of Christian spiritual formation.

Moving on to *images*, Willard explains that, as opposed to the abstractness of ideas, images are concrete, specific, and have the power to evoke strong feeling. Images occupy the mind and “mediate the power of [the idea systems they represent] into the real situations of ordinary life” (Willard 2002, 99). By way of examples in recent American history, Willard (*ibid.*) points to hair (long, short, skinhead), brassieres (or the absence or burning thereof), flags (and their desecration), and rock music (and the like or dislike thereof) as images that mediate the presence of conflicting idea systems in public life and morality. Images exert considerable power over the person. Willard goes so far as to say that they, together with the ideas they mediate, are “a primary stronghold of evil in the human self and society” (*ibid.*).¹³³ The converse is also true, namely that certain images mediate the power of good, virtuous idea systems to the persons and societies in whose minds they occupy space.¹³⁴ Christian spiritual

132 Moreland (2000, 32) explains that transformation of character and behaviour is driven by the change of one’s “beliefs,” and that these beliefs can be changed intentionally. Moreland’s notion of “beliefs” is akin to Willard’s “ideas,” and he understands the intentional changing of one’s beliefs (to align with biblical truth) to be what Paul meant by his instruction to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. It is worth noting, though, that Moreland’s (cf. 2000, 26–29) proposal for the nature and structure of the soul is different to Willard’s. Nevertheless, Moreland’s understanding of how beliefs function as a “state” of the soul, and of their consequent role in the whole person, is not dissimilar to the function of ideas in the self per Willard’s analysis. Thus, their respective proposals for the roles of “ideas” and “beliefs” in the enterprise of spiritual formation are very closely aligned.

133 One thinks, for example, of the image of the swastika—the symbol of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party—and the associated idea system it mediated in Europe in the 20th Century.

134 One thinks of images of Nelson Mandela’s face in public spaces in South Africa and the ideas of forgiveness, magnanimity, unity, statesmanship, and the like that are mediated by those images. On a personal level, the image of a silhouette of Table Mountain is a concrete representation of a whole interlocked system of ideas, such as family, friends, fun, belonging and, most powerfully, home.

formation, then, according to Willard (*ibid.*, 101), entails replacing false and destructive ideas and images with those that occupied Jesus's mind.

What image, then, could we select as representative of the mind of Christ? Willard (2002, 99) is emphatic in his conviction that the cross is the image Jesus self-selected to represent both himself and his message. New Testament scholars Blomberg (2009, 116) and Witherington (2001, 134) both affirm that the four Gospels are dominated by their passion narratives, each of which climaxes at the cross. We may therefore safely say that the four inspired Gospel writers saw the cross as the image *par excellence* to represent Jesus. Our own study, too, bears out Willard's view with respect to the concrete image of the cross mediating a vast system of ideas concerning the person and work of Jesus. For Jesus the cross was the image that most comprehensively represented his willing obedience as Son to his Father (cf. Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). It also represented the accomplishment of his salvific work arising from the *pactum salutis* and culminating in the adoption of sons to the praise of the Father's grace (cf. Eph 1:3–14; Gal 4:4–5).

We have already seen that the indwelling "Spirit of adoption" (Rom 8:15) is the very "Spirit of Christ" (Rom 8:9) and that, therefore, his ministry of transformation within every adopted son is to conform them increasingly to the likeness of Christ (cf. 4.3.5, "Church" herein). Further, we noted that this entails that all adopted sons must spend their earthly lives walking towards the cross in willing submission to the Father's will. The cross is therefore the appropriate image that ought to mediate to God's adopted sons not only the person and work of Christ, but also the system of ideas that ought to govern their own lives. Indeed, the apostle Paul teaches exactly this in his letter to the Philippians, saying that the ideas that governed Jesus's life and that led him to a willing death on the cross are the self-same ideas that ought to govern the lives of all Christians (cf. Phil 2:5–8). Willard (1997, 284) explains that, for the Christian, living a life governed by the cross does not mean doing *what* Jesus did, but instead doing what the Father calls each of us to do *as* Jesus did. In other words, it is the Christlike disposition of willing obedience to the Father that characterises all the Father's children. Since the ministry of the indwelling Spirit of Christ that makes believers willing to embrace the cross as the representative image of their own lives as sons of God is

inextricably interwoven with the accomplishment of adoption, we see that the adoption metaphor carries (arguably) unique potential for Christian spiritual formation.

Next, Willard develops the importance of *information* in the thought life of the believer. Not much needs to be said on this point—simply that the transformation of the mind requires correct information, mainly about God. It is noteworthy, though, that what Willard (2002, 103–104) draws most attention to in developing his argument is the revelation of God as *Father*. In fact, Willard does not arbitrarily choose this emphasis, rather, he sees this as the emphasis of Jesus’s teaching about God to the elect.¹³⁵ Jesus had to combat false information, says Willard, and give “the correct Father facts (Matt 11:27; John 6:46)” (ibid., 103). Of course, it is by adoption that the elect come into relationship with God as Father and so, again, we note the importance of the doctrine for spiritual formation.

Finally, in the realm of thought, Willard points to the critical role of *good thinking*. Thinking, says Willard, “is the activity of searching out what *must* be true, or *cannot* be true, in light of given facts or assumptions” (Willard 2002, 104, emphasis original). As we think on the correct information about God, so the ideas and images that governed Jesus through his thought life will likewise come to govern our own lives (ibid., 105). Willard cites Psalms 19 and 119 in reminding us that the activity of thinking on the information of the Scriptures, under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, “restores the soul” (ibid., 106).

Key to Willard’s understanding on this matter is the tight relationship between good thinking and worship. Willard explains:

To bring the mind to dwell intelligently upon God as he is presented in his Word will have the effect of causing us to love God passionately, and this love will in turn bring us to think of God steadily. Thus he will always be before our minds. ... In this way we enter a life of *worship* ... and worship is the single most powerful force in completing and sustaining restoration in the whole person (Willard 2002, 106–107, emphasis original).

135 Willard echoes Calvin on this point.

Recall that, for Willard, the correct information about God as presented in the Scriptures—at least with respect to his relationship to believers—is that he is *Father*. What Willard proposes, therefore, amounts to a life of intelligent contemplation of and worship of God as Father, which entails an ever-deepening embrace of one’s identity as his adopted son.¹³⁶

In drawing this section to a close, another of Willard’s ideas will serve us well, namely his notion of the “lifescape” (Willard 2002, 96). In that same way as our physical senses present a landscape for our body and its actions, Willard says, “so our thoughts present the ‘lifescape’ for our will and our life as a whole” (ibid.). We have shown in the preceding discussion that all four factors involved in the realm of thought (i.e., ideas, images, information, and the ability to think) are organically connected to the doctrine of adoption, and thus we propose that the conjoined realities of adoptive sonship and the Fatherhood of God ought to form the lifescape of every Christian. We conclude, therefore, that the doctrine of adoption bears meaningful implications for the transformation of the mind, at least in the realm of thought. We proceed now to investigate possible implications for the realm of feeling.

5.4.2 Adoption and the transformation of the mind, 2: Feeling

“Feeling,” Willard says, “encompasses a *range* of things that are felt: specifically, sensations, desires, and emotions” (Willard 2002, 120, emphasis original). Beyond this general description, “feeling” becomes difficult to define. Even so, the power of feeling is well known to every person. It is common wisdom that feelings make good servants but terrible masters, and there is no doubt that much human action is motivated more by feeling than—directly—by thought.¹³⁷ Thus, if in Christian spiritual formation a comprehensive transformation of the whole person is envisaged, then the realm of feeling cannot be ignored. Feelings belonging to the sinful nature must be removed, and new feelings befitting the Christian’s new nature must take their place (ibid., 117).

136 Nordling (2010, 198–212) concurs on the importance of worship as a means to spiritual formation and expands helpfully on this dynamic in the context of the gathered worship of the church.

137 James, for example, teaches that sinful and destructive behaviours flow from sinful and destructive feelings (Jas 3:16).

Yet, Willard (*ibid.*, 118) argues, it is not possible, in moments of choice, to conquer one's feelings by sheer willpower. A different strategy is required.

The first step, according to Willard (2002, 119), is to realise that one's feelings do not have to be satisfied.¹³⁸ This understanding of our relationship to our desires is comprehended within the scope of the adoption metaphor. The apostle Paul explains that we owe nothing to our fleshly nature (i.e., we do not have to satisfy its desires), but instead we who are now sons of God are led by the Spirit of God (Rom 8:12–14).

Next, it is a matter of replacing sinful and destructive feelings with the kind of feelings that Jesus experienced, namely the desire to please his Father. Again, Willard's insight aligns very closely with Paul's teaching on the matter in the immediate context of his adoption metaphor: those whose minds are set on the things of the flesh desire to please the flesh, whereas those whose minds are set on the things of the Holy Spirit desire to please God (Rom 8:5–8). Note that in both instances feeling follows thought. But Paul's argument is that the adopted have new thoughts (i.e., minds set on the things of the Spirit), which in turn yield new desires (i.e., to please God). Jesus provides the ultimate example of this in Gethsemane when, denying his own desire to avoid what lay ahead, he chose instead to embrace the Father's will (cf. Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42).

Willard's VIM framework comes into service at this point. One must have a "vision," Willard argues, and a firm "intention" to realise it. With these two in place the "means" will not be wanting. As it relates to the realm of feeling, Willard explains:

If a strong and compelling vision of myself as one who is simply free from intense [sinful or destructive desires] can possess me, then I am in a position to desire not to have the desires I now have. And then means can be effectively sought to that end (Willard 2002, 119).

The argument necessarily extends to its corollary—that one can come to strongly desire to desire what one does not now desire. It is the vision of oneself as conformed to the likeness of Christ that inspires the whole enterprise. As we have already argued,

¹³⁸ Millar observes this same transformative emphasis in Paul's writings. One of the ten aspects of change that Millar distils from Paul he titles "Learning to say 'no' to ungodliness" (Millar 2021, 162).

the essential element of Christlikeness in this respect is the desire to please the Father.¹³⁹ This vision and the belief that it is achievable are grounded in the doctrine of adoption.

At times, though, believers will act according to sinful desire. In addressing this reality, we make use of the important distinction Willard (2002, 123–124) recognises between *feelings* and underlying *conditions* that give rise to those feelings. By way of example, Willard points to the person who mistakes the *feeling* of peacefulness for the actual *condition* of peace. Such a person is likely to try to manage and maintain the feeling of peacefulness and may be unwilling to do what is necessary to achieve the actual condition of peace—which sometimes requires confrontation. In the enterprise of Christian spiritual formation, Willard (*ibid.*, 123) argues, we must live in accord with the objectively true condition of things—as the Scriptures teach them—and trust that appropriate feelings will follow in due course. This insight aligns closely with Paul’s teaching that adopted sons of God ought to live according to the reality of their sonship (i.e., their condition), and not according to the feelings that will occasionally seek to draw them away from that reality (Rom 8:1–17). Though at times they may feel condemned because of their sin (Rom 8:1), they are not in fact condemned. Rather, they are “in Christ” (8:1), “sons” (8:14), “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (8:17)—all statements of objective conditions that accompany adoption.

Within the scope of the adoption metaphor, we find resources for holding the realm of feeling in its proper place. We do not need to satisfy our feelings; instead, we desire to be led by the Holy Spirit. We are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ such that our sinful and destructive feelings are progressively replaced by feelings accompanying the condition of sonship, namely the desire to please the Father. It is a clear vision of Jesus, the Son par excellence, that inspires the whole enterprise and, when we fail by yielding to sinful desire, it is on the basis of the objective condition of our sonship in Christ that we remain free of condemnation and in the comfort of the Father’s love. Thus, we see that

139 This does not mean that no other desires are ever present. Even in the ultimate example of this (i.e., Jesus in Gethsemane), we see that Jesus experienced a strong competing desire to his desire to please the Father, namely the desire to avoid what he knew was imminent. Our argument is not that the desire to please the Father is the sole desire of the adopted; rather, it is that this desire, ideally, ultimately rises above others.

the transformation of the feeling realm is as closely tied to adoption as is the transformation of the realm of thought.

5.4.3 Adoption and the transformation of the will

Thus far we have seen that Christian spiritual formation entails a *thought life* centred on God as Father, with the dimension of *feeling* informed by the *objective condition* of adoptive sonship in Christ. But, as Willard (2002, 141–142) observes, such an ideal state of thought and feeling cannot be achieved or sustained apart from the simultaneous renovation of other dimensions of the person—most notably the *will*. Such renovation of the will, according to Willard, begins with the honest recognition of the state of the human will, which, apart from God, is characterised by “fragmentation and multiplicity ... [willing] many things [that] cannot be reconciled with each other” (ibid., 147). Given that the mind (i.e., thought and feeling) is turned away from God (cf. Rom 1:18–32), it follows that the will cannot but fall into chaos. Moreover, in the objective condition of alienation from God, the will is not only fragmented and multiplicitous but also duplicitous, “not just in the sense of doubleness, but in the sense of deception” (ibid.) of ourselves and others.

The transformation of the will must (in terms of Willard’s VIM framework) begin with the vision of a Christlike will, which Willard understands most fundamentally with reference to sonship.¹⁴⁰ Quoting Jesus’s own statement that he “always [does] the things that are pleasing to [his Father]” (John 8:29), Willard (2002, 143) goes on to explain that the Christlike will is characterised by joyous and unwavering devotion to the Father and his will. But the will does not function independently of the mind and cannot exercise its volitional function (i.e., choosing) except in terms of thoughts and feelings. The will, says Willard, is “hemmed in” by the thoughts and feelings present in the mind at the moment of willing (ibid., 142). However, even though the will is constrained by the content of the mind in any *single moment*, it is the will that largely

140 Millar says something similar in his description of those who learn, increasingly, to reflect the character of Jesus. He contends that “those who ‘belong to Christ’ (Gal 5:24) and ‘walk by the Spirit’ (Gal 5:25) are those who *resemble Jesus at the deepest level*” (Millar 2021, 154, emphasis added). Our contention is that what it means to “resemble Jesus at the deepest level” is, most essentially, to relate, in Christ, to the Father as an adoptive son, and that this entails willing the Father’s pleasure (cf. Phil 2:13). Millar recognises exactly this in another of his ten aspects of change, entitled “Pleasing God more and more” (ibid., 145), in which he explains that believers’ wills are transformed such that they have an “ever-increasing desire and determination to bring pleasure to the Father” (ibid., 146).

determines what thoughts and feelings are available to the mind in any *future moment*. In adulthood what a person thinks and feels is very much a matter of what they choose (i.e., what they *will*) to think and feel. Thus, the condition of the mind has substantially to do with the direction in which the will is set (ibid.).

Relating the Christian formation of the will to the doctrine of adoption, we begin by noting that Willard's description of the transformed will dovetails neatly with our theo-dramatic presentation in Chapter 4. The Christlike will, informed by the mind that understands (i.e., in the realm of thought) the big-picture theo-drama it is part of and that desires (i.e., in the realm of feeling) that the glory of the Father's grace be known, has the resources to make Christlike choices (i.e., choices that are pleasing to the Father) and thus participate fittingly in the drama. We have already noted Paul's teaching that Christians ought to "have this mind ... which is [theirs] in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5), namely that a cruciform life, as representative of fitting participation in the great theo-drama, is the Father's will for them. We now note further that Paul follows this instruction with the affirmation that "it is God who works in [Christians], both to *will* and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13, emphasis added). It is also noteworthy that Paul's most proximate descriptor of God is "God the Father" (Phil 2:11). Thus, though the adoption metaphor does not feature in Paul's letter to the Philippians, the broader ideas of the Fatherhood of God and the sonship of believers (patterned after the Sonship of Christ) are implied.

More directly, we note the logic of Paul's exhortation to the Galatian believers. Paul begins by expounding a system of ideas (i.e., in the realm of thought) centred on their adoption to sonship in Christ (Gal 4:3–7). This is followed by a corresponding emotional roller coaster ride (i.e., in the realm of feeling) based on the existential realities of their release from slavery into freedom (Gal 4:8–9, 21–31) and of his own true love for them versus the deceitful flattery of others (Gal 4:12–20). Following these conjoined ideas and feelings, Paul entreats them (i.e., he calls upon them to exercise their wills) to stand firm in the freedom won for them (Gal 5:1).

A similar logic holds in Romans 8. The call in the first half of the chapter is for Paul's readers to "set their minds on the things of the Spirit" (Rom 8:5). In other words, Paul calls upon believers to employ the faculty of *will* to supply their minds with true information concerning their objective condition, namely that they are adopted sons of

God the Father. We note that it is in the context of Paul's exposition of the accomplishment of adoption in Christ that this call to exercise the will is made. Thus we see, again, that the doctrine of adoption holds powerful promise for the enterprise of Christian spiritual formation.

5.4.4 Adoption and the transformation of the body

The body, for Willard, is essential to spirituality and “must come to serve [believers] as a primary ally in Christlikeness” (Willard 2002, 159). Indeed, in view of Willard's understanding of Christian spiritual formation—that it entails the formation of the inner life of the self such that it takes on the character of the inner life of Jesus himself, with the result that the outer life of the follower of Jesus becomes an organic expression of the inner life of Jesus—spiritual formation that does not encompass the bodily life of the believer is, at best, incomplete.¹⁴¹

There are two dynamics regarding the bodily life that must, according to Willard, be reckoned with in Christian spiritual formation. The first has to do with the idolisation of the body, and the second with the moral character of the bodily life. With respect to the former, Willard (2002, 160) argues that entailed in human rebellion against God is the enthroning of the human body—together with its desires—as the object of worship. This leads to a life of sensuality; the body becomes the primary instrument for gratification, and its desires must be satisfied.¹⁴² Translating from Willardian to Pauline language: having supplanted God as supreme, the human self, in particular the bodily life, *must* be worshipped and its lusts obeyed (ibid., 53; cf. Rom 1:25).

As to the latter point, namely the moral character of the body, Willard posits that the body is the primary place of human dominion and responsibility. The body is the only physical entity to which one has *direct access* via the will. Thus it is in and through the

141 For Millar, transformed actions are an inevitable result of transformed thought. We noted earlier Millar's observations on the thought life, and now cite his comments in full to include the aspect of bodily action: “We are no longer trapped in the downward spiral of *thinking and acting* [described in Rom 1]. Instead ... the process where our *thought patterns and actions* are slowly but surely aligned with those of the Lord Jesus has begun” (Millar 2021, 153, emphasis added). Millar's tight coupling of thought and action corresponds with Willard's, notwithstanding that Willard develops the related aspects of feeling and will as a bridge between the two in his six-aspect schema.

142 Willard fleshes this argument out in Chapter 3 of *Renovation* (“Radical Evil in the Ruined Soul”) and in particular on pp. 50–54.

body that the person has an actuated presence in the world and in relationship to others. Further, it is through the body that the person seeks to conform the world to their own desires, and then encounters conflict when they run into realities that do not yield to their will (i.e., the desires of others). At this point we see that, in Willard's model, the bodily life has moral character insofar as it seeks (i.e., as an expression of the *will*) to realise the desires (i.e., the *feelings* associated with the *idea systems* in the mind) of the self in the physical realm. Furthermore, Willard argues, moral character has largely to do with what our bodies "are or are not 'at the ready' to do in the specific situations in which we find ourselves ... [and] those readiesses [driven by our feelings] *reside in fairly specific parts of the body*" (Willard 2002, 162, emphasis original). Willard points to the tongue as an example of this reality in action. The tongue, he argues, has a readiness to act wrongly—an inclination to sinful, destructive speech that resides in it. Thoughtful and honest people will, Willard (2002, 166–167) says, admit that they find similar "readinesses" (i.e., inclinations to sin) present in their hands, eyebrows, loins, and so forth. Thus Christian spiritual formation entails replacing the "readinesses" of our bodily lives to actuate the desires of the flesh (i.e., the sin-enclaved nature) with readiness to actuate Christlike desires.¹⁴³

In relating the above to the doctrine of adoption, we begin by noting the distinctly Pauline flavour of Willard's proposal. In his letter to the Roman church, Paul explains that those who "suppress the truth [about God] ... became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom 1:18–22). Thus far Paul has described, in Willardian terms, the aspects of the *mind* (i.e., the realm of thought and feeling) and the *heart* (i.e., the will) in rebellion against God. What comes next is telling: "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the *dishonouring of their bodies* among themselves ... [that is,] to dishonourable passions [that were actuated in the parts of their bodies]" (Rom 1:24, 26–27, emphasis added).¹⁴⁴ The trajectory is

143 It is beyond the scope of our study to delve into this, but Willard (cf. 2002, 172–176) outlines something akin to an annual ceremony of consecration of the body to the will of God as a means by which believers are to bring their bodies into such a state of readiness.

144 Paul affirms the moral character of the bodily life when he parallels the impurity of the heart with actual bodily instances of sin (Rom 1:24). Though the context of this argument highlights the negative moral character, the parallel nevertheless affirms the principle that the bodily aspect of the human self possesses moral character.

unmistakable: A mind (in rebellion against God) coupled to a will (in rebellion against God) leads to the body actuating the desires of the mind-will in rebellion against God.

The same dynamic is evident in the immediately following verses (Rom 1:28–32), in which Paul describes those who “did not see fit to acknowledge God” (i.e., a posture of defiance rooted in the will) being given over to “a debased mind” (i.e., the dimension of thought and feeling) to “do what ought not to be done” (i.e., bodily acts of sin as actuated instances of the mind and will in rebellion against God). These are not only sexual in nature (as in the previous section, vv. 26–27), but encompass every part of the body that is active in evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, gossip, slander, disobedience to parents, ruthlessness, and so on (Rom 1:29–31).

Summarising this section of his argument, Paul writes that “no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside ... no one does good” (Rom 3:11–12). Notice again the progression from the dimension of the *mind* (i.e., understanding) to that of the *will* (i.e., seeking, turning aside) to that of the *body* (i.e., doing good, or not, as the case may be). The actual expressions of bodily sin are then described with reference to particular parts of the body—throat, tongue, lips, mouth, feet, and hands (implied in the shedding of blood, v. 15).

Paul goes on to explain that “God put [Christ Jesus] forward as a propitiation by his blood” (Rom 3:25) and thereby provided for the justification of the elect. Yet, as we have already noted earlier in our study, the mountaintop of salvific accomplishment is reached not in justification, in Chapter 3, but in adoption, in Chapter 8. We shall come to adoption momentarily but note first that, on the basis of Christ’s death and resurrection, Paul instructs believers not to permit sin to reign in their mortal bodies. “Do not present *your members* to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and *your members* to God as instruments for righteousness” (Rom 6:13, emphasis added). Paul expects the conscience, deliberate presentation of the actual parts of our bodies to God to do good.

This expectation notwithstanding, Paul has not yet explained how the believer is enabled to such actuated righteousness. He has explained, in federal terms, the emancipation from sin and death of those who were “in Adam” to righteousness and

life “through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 5:21), but then goes on immediately to acknowledge the ongoing struggle against indwelling sin for those whose only resource in the fight is their own willpower. Even knowing the relevant truths so far enunciated (i.e., chs. 3 to 6), Paul still finds himself unable to fully break the hold of sinful desires over his body (Rom 7:15–25). These instances of ongoing sin are not unto condemnation (Rom 8:1); nevertheless, Paul wishes to be free of the power of “sin that dwells in [his] members” (Rom 7:23). Note, again, the trajectory: Paul *delights* in the law of God with his *mind* (i.e., the realm of thought and feeling has been transformed, cf. Rom 7:22, 25), his desire is now to do God’s *will* (i.e., the realm of the will is being transformed, cf. Rom 7:18, 21), but the members of his physical *body* are still at war with his transformed mind and will. In other words, the transformation of the mind and will do not automatically result in a transformation of the bodily life. Yet, though it is not automatic, Paul still commands believers to an actually transformed bodily life in this world (cf. Rom 6:13, 19). The question, then, is how obedience to this summons will be enabled, and Paul answers it in terms of adoption.

We have already seen earlier in our study that the soteriological accomplishments of adoption and of the indwelling of the Spirit are one and the same. Indeed, the Spirit is called the “Spirit of adoption” (Rom 8:15). We need not repeat our exegesis but will draw out several implications for Christian spiritual formation. First, it is noteworthy that Paul reaches the summit of his argument regarding the interrelationship of mind, will, and body, and their release from the grip of sin and death, in the language of adoption to sonship. It is further noteworthy that what immediately follows Paul’s explication of adoption in Chapter 8 is his exhortation to the adopted to “be transformed by the renewal of [their minds]” and to “present [their] bodies” to God as an act of spiritual worship (cf. Rom 12:1–2).¹⁴⁵

Second, we note Paul’s assumption that the mind and will together unavoidably overflow into bodily action. The adopted are to “set their minds on the things of the Spirit” (i.e., engaging both their *wills* and their *minds*, Rom 8:5), which will result in

145 Without relegating chapters 9 to 11 of Romans to the status of a mere diversion from Paul’s main line of argument, we nevertheless, with Moo (1996, 547–554) and Schreiner (2018, 460–465), regard it as a distinct unit of argument—related to the whole of chapters 1 through 8—and parenthetical to the progression from the end of Chapter 8 into Chapter 12.

them living according to the Spirit (i.e., actuating Christlike desires in their bodily lives).¹⁴⁶

Third, we note that adoption speaks to each of these dimensions of the human self. To the dimension of thought and feeling (i.e., the mind), adoption instructs us in Christlikeness as we learn what pleases our heavenly Father and as we delight in pleasing him. To the dimension of the (human) spirit (i.e., spirit, heart, and will considered in all three of its aspects), adoption is the salvific reality by which the Spirit—called the Spirit “of God,” “of Christ,” and “of adoption” in the immediate context (Rom 8:9, 15)—comes to dwell in the adopted (cf. Rom 8:9–11). To the bodily dimension, adoption is the privilege by which sons are “led by the Spirit of God” and thus “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13–14). Further, it is by adoption that sons come to be so conformed to the likeness of Christ in their bodily lives that they suffer with him and will be glorified with him (Rom 8:17). Finally, as regards the bodily life, it is in terms of adoption that sons eagerly await the final redemption of their bodies (Rom 8:23). Thus we affirm once more that, in the bodily dimension of the human person as much as in the dimensions of mind and will, the doctrine of adoption not only contains possibilities for Christian spiritual formation but actually necessitates and empowers it.

5.4.5 Adoption and the transformation of the social dimension

Willard’s analysis of the social aspect of the human person builds from the premise that “the natural condition of life for human beings is one of reciprocal rootedness in others” (Willard 2002, 179).¹⁴⁷ It is not possible, therefore, for spiritual formation to omit the social realm. In order to understand how the social dimension of the self may be *transformed*, we must understand how it is *formed* in the first place. To this end Willard

146 Issler concurs, arguing that because Jesus depended on the Holy Spirit in his own earthly life, the ministry of the Spirit must, therefore, be “*essential* to the daily experience of every believer who wishes to please God in all that is done, [and] to grow more into Christlikeness” (Issler 2000, 12, emphasis original). It is noteworthy that Issler highlights the desire to please God the Father as the leading mark of growth in Christlikeness.

147 Recent work in both sociology and social psychology supports Willard’s premise. Social constructionism (building on the work of George Herbert Mead) stresses the importance of sociocultural influence in what Alma and Zock call the “process of self construction” (Alma and Zock 2002, 1). Sociologist McMinn presses the matter further, explaining that humans are relational creatures, constantly being shaped in the context of various relationships such that the “possibility for self-made autonomous personhood” is doubtful (McMinn 2017, 150). Instead, McMinn posits, “‘belonging’ is a code God implanted in our DNA at the beginning” (ibid., 151).

introduces the concept of “circles of sufficiency” (ibid., 179–180). Circles of sufficiency are secure relationships in which the persons concerned have strong assurance of the other being *for* them. At a human level the most basic circle of sufficiency is (or at least ought to be) the experience a baby has of its mother. This circle depends for its own well-being on a larger circle that supports it—in this case the slightly larger circle of baby and mother plus father, which in turn is nourished by the larger family circle, and so on. Each larger circle, though less intimate, has a character appropriate to the nature of the relationships involved and is necessary to the survival of the smaller. The mother-and-child circle, for example, may be seriously affected by a war on the other side of the world. Ultimately, Willard (ibid., 180) argues, every human circle is doomed to dissolution unless it is rooted in the only self-sufficient circle of sufficiency, namely, the Trinitarian relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit. Conversely, caught up in the circle of the Trinity, damaged human circles can heal. As we have seen in other dimensions of the human life, though, transformation is not automatic and must begin with an understanding of the problem.

Willard (2002, 181) argues that, because of sin, no human relationships are what they should be. Human beings are all wounded, sometimes very deeply, by the failure of others, and this failure is in essence *lovelessness*. Further, these injuries are often inflicted by those in their most intimate circles of sufficiency. In Willard’s (ibid., 181–182) analysis relational lovelessness is not a vague charge but takes two specific forms, namely *assault* and *withdrawal*. Willard (ibid., 182) defines assault as acting against the good of others (even if they have consented to that action), and withdrawal as indifference to the well-being and good of others. While granting that the Bible’s teaching on assault and withdrawal is not limited to them, Willard (ibid., 187) anchors his analysis in the Ten Commandments, the last six of which he understands as addressing forms of assault—in other words, ways in which humans are most likely to injure others. In essence the impetus to assault is disordered or unrestrained *desire*—wanting something so much as to harm others to get it. Willard explains that, being two forms of the same essential human failure (i.e., lovelessness), assault and withdrawal differ only in emphasis. People always distance themselves from those they assault,

and withdrawal from a person is nearly always a way of assaulting them.¹⁴⁸ There is some good we are able to give the other, and we choose not to. These forms of lovelessness are evident in all human relationships, not least between persons in the most intimate circles of sufficiency.¹⁴⁹

In contrast to the lovelessness that does, in fact, characterise human society at every level, Willard says relationships ought to be characterised by “constant mutual blessing” as appropriate to the nature of the relationships involved (Willard 2002, 188).¹⁵⁰ Transformed relationships are necessary to Christian spiritual formation and are possible because God is love (ibid., 184). As for the Christian each social circle of sufficiency is ultimately rooted in God, so love should come increasingly to characterise each social circle of a Christian’s life.¹⁵¹ Our contention is that the soteriological accomplishment of adoption necessarily entails the transformation of the social dimension.

The transformation of the social dimension of Christian life is clearly envisaged in the immediate context of the adoption metaphors in Paul’s letters. In Galatians Paul teaches that adoption entails that God has “sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” (Gal 4:6) and follows this with an exhortation to “walk by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16). In this

148 Willard (2002, 188) grants that withdrawal sometimes stems not from the intention to harm the other, but rather from fear, weakness, disgust, or uncertainty. Even so, whether intended or not, relational withdrawal still injures the other.

149 Willard (2002, 189–194) unpacks the nature of assault and withdrawal in marriage and family life in detail, and argues that the transformation of these circles of sufficiency is indispensable to the health of relationships in broader circles.

150 McMinn argues that an important aspect of Christian spiritual formation is the recognition of the sociocultural assumptions that shape us. One of these, she says, at least in the post-Enlightenment West, is the notion of the autonomous self. Contra this assumption and the patterns of life that flow from it, McMinn says that, as we invest in the good of others, “our souls re-ignite a fire of belonging that draws us toward God and others” (McMinn 2017, 151). Though McMinn does not appear to mean quite the same thing as Willard does by “soul,” nevertheless her exhortation to “invest in the good of others” as an expression of healthy Christian spiritual formation aligns closely with Willard’s vision of relationships characterised by constant mutual blessing.

151 Millar likewise recognises healthy relationships as inherent to Pauline spiritual formation. In fact, the first of the ten aspects of change that Millar distils from Paul he entitles “Abounding in love” (Millar 2021, 145). Millar explains that believers abounding in love is an evidence of God at work among them, that God alone can produce this reality, and that he does so by the ministry of the Spirit. It must be noted, though, that Millar and Willard may not have the same context in mind; Millar’s argument seems to imply that this ‘abounding love’ is a reality evident between God’s people (i.e., in the church), whereas Willard argues for relationships of all kinds characterised by mutual blessing. Millar may have a broader application in mind in saying that the ministry of the Spirit enables believers to “love others” (i.e., without limitation to the church) in a Christlike manner (ibid.) but, even if not, Millar’s recognition that Christian spiritual formation necessarily encompasses the social sphere accords with Willard’s position on the matter. In this respect both are faithfully Pauline.

latter instance the Spirit is set in opposition to the flesh, and the “desires of the Spirit” and “the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16–17) are at enmity. Notice the bodily behaviours that characterise those who aim to satisfy the desires of the flesh: “sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these” (Gal 5:19–21). Willard’s “assault and withdrawal” are amply in evidence here. The Christian, however, walks “by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16), and that Spirit has already been identified as the “Spirit of [God’s] Son” (Gal 4:6). To walk by the Spirit is Paul’s shorthand for Willard’s mind → heart → body paradigm. This is why Paul can speak of the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22). The fruit of the Spirit is traits or dispositions that characterise those whose minds (i.e., the realm of thought and feeling) and hearts (i.e., the realm of desire and volition) are increasingly conformed to the likeness of Christ such that Christlike bodily actions (including speech) follow organically. Thus those who walk by the Spirit are characterised by “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Gal 5:22–23). It is beyond the scope of our study to delve deeply into this, but both Moo (2013, 364) and Schreiner (2010, 348) find it significant that *love* heads the list. It also cannot escape notice that the fruit of the Spirit has necessarily to do with the realm of social relations. Love, for example, must have an object. The same holds true for patience, kindness, and gentleness at least. Thus, it is the ministry of the “Spirit of the Son” (Gal 4:6)—a salvific reality bound up in adoption—that transforms those who once gratified the desires of the flesh into those of a loving disposition, whose bodily actions (including speech) in the social circles of their lives become “a play of constant mutual blessing” (Willard 2002, 188).

A similar argument could be advanced from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. Paul begins with an extended eulogy in which he explains how the ultimate purpose of God to glorify his own grace is met in the accomplishment of adoption (Eph 1:1–14). Paul goes on to explain related matters, such as the immeasurable power that was at work in the accomplishment of adoption through Christ (Eph 1:19–21), and to unpack the implications of that accomplishment for the life and unity of the Christian community (Eph 2:11–3:13), but the grounding reality remains the salvific decree of God, which has its ultimate expression in adoption (Eph 1:5). Adoption, therefore, remains the ultimate ground of all the socio-ethical instructions that follow. Thus the general summons to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called”

(Eph 4:1) reaches back, ultimately, to the believer's election and predestination to adoptive sonship. Likewise, the more specific instruction to "be imitators of God, as beloved children [and] walk in love, as Christ loved us" (Eph 5:1–2) also stands upon the objective condition of adoptive sonship and is followed by both specific injunctions against behaviours destructive to healthy relationships among God's people (Eph 5:3–21; contra the behaviours of the "sons of disobedience" in Eph 2:2, and "children of wrath" in Eph 2:3) and exhortations to social behaviours befitting adopted sons (albeit that this is, in part, developed through a new metaphor, namely "children of light" in Eph 5:8).

Once again, though, we find that Paul's teaching in Romans provides a more detailed treatment of the matter. It is the accomplishment of adoption in Chapter 8, as the apex soteriological accomplishment, that grounds the call (cf. Rom 12:1–2) to transformed social relations among the children of God (who are then described as members of one body in Christ, cf. Rom 12:4–5).¹⁵² Indeed, Willard's vision of social relationships at every level as characterised by "constant mutual blessing" (Willard 2002, 188), in contrast to the lovelessness that plagues human society, is exactly what Paul calls for. Adopted believers are to "love one another with brotherly affection" and even to "bless those who persecute [them]" (Rom 12:10–14). Assault and withdrawal, as forms of lovelessness, are replaced by relationships characterised by humility (cf. Rom 12:3), mutual service (cf. Rom 12:4–8), love (cf. Rom 12:9–10), generosity and hospitality (cf. Rom 12:13), empathy (cf. Rom 12:15), and harmony (cf. Rom 12:16). Some of these apply to relationships between the adopted, and some to relationships with others, but all are grounded in the call to believers to present their bodies to God for his service, which in turn is grounded in the renewal of the mind in the truths already expounded earlier in the letter (cf. Rom 12:1–2)—the culmination of which is the soteriological accomplishment of adoption (cf. Rom 8). Thus we may say with confidence that the

152 It should be noted, though, that Willard's proposal addresses the transformation of the social dimension of the *self* and, though the church is essential to that transformation, it is not itself an aspect of the self. Nevertheless, Willard sees the local congregation as essential to Christian spiritual formation, and the goal of spiritual formation as "the exclusive primary goal of the local congregation" (Willard 2002, 235; cf. Tan in Barton et al. 2014, 293–294). Wilhoit, likewise, argues that the formation of its members in Christlikeness is the reason for the church's existence. "The church was formed to form," he says (Wilhoit in Barton et al. 2014, 296).

doctrine of adoption bears strong entailments for the transformation of the social dimension of the believer's life.

5.4.6 Adoption and the transformation of the soul

Having addressed the mind, heart, bodily life, and social dimension of the human self, we come finally to consider the transformation of the soul. An immediate difficulty is that, while we know (or at least have an intuitive sense of) what the former aspects are, we are less confident that we know what the soul is. Willard (2002, 202) explains that modern psychology—in keeping with the modern rejection of any nonphysical reality—rejects the notion of the soul. It is not surprising, therefore, that understanding of the soul is shallow in modern times.¹⁵³

What, then, is Willard's understanding of the soul? Willard derives his understanding of this aspect of the human self from his understanding of the soul of God. At a time when God's people had fallen into gross idolatry, the prophet Jeremiah delivered the Lord's warning: "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my *soul* depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited" (Jer 6:8 KJV, emphasis added). Here God is said to have a soul, which Willard takes to mean "the deepest, most fundamental level of his being" (ibid., 206).¹⁵⁴ Similarly, identifying Jesus as the promised Servant, God speaks of him as "my beloved with whom my *soul* is well pleased" (Matt 12:18, emphasis added).¹⁵⁵ Taking these and other biblical references to both God's soul and

153 Hernandez admits that, notwithstanding millennia of reflection on the matter from philosophers, theologians, psychologists, and scientists, we do not really know what the soul is—it remains a "mysterious phenomenon" (Hernandez 2011, 764).

154 Fredericks cautions against importing a Greek psychological paradigm into ψυχή (soul, Jer 6:8 KJV). While granting that, at times, it does refer to the "inner person," its basic meaning is literally "breath" and, more figuratively, "life" (Fredericks 1997, 133). Nevertheless, the KJV rendering of "soul" in this instance is foundational to Willard's understanding of the soul—both human and divine. Moreland (2018, 55–75) proposes an alternative understanding of the soul, namely that it is "a simple (containing no separable parts), spatially unextended substance that contains the capacities for consciousness and for animating, enlivening, and developing its body" (ibid., 69). In Moreland's model the soul has faculties (i.e., the mind, will, emotions, and powers to produce and enliven a body), whereas in Willard's the soul is one aspect of the person, as are the others mentioned. It is beyond the scope of our study to engage these issues; we simply note here that, in addition to Willard's, modern evangelical proposals for the understanding of the soul do exist. This concession does not diminish Willard's usefulness as an interlocutor for this section of our study; in particular, the fact that Willard explicitly sought to relate a theological and philosophically sound understanding of the human self—and holistically so—to the enterprise of Christian spiritual formation aligns neatly with our goals.

155 BDAG affirms that understanding ψυχή (psychē) as the dematerialised aspect, or life-principle, of the human person is legitimate (BDAG, 1098).

human souls, Willard concludes that the soul refers to the “ultimate depths of [a person’s] being” and is something that cannot be communicated with words such as “person” or “self” or the like (Willard 2002, 206). The soul is “that aspect of [one’s] whole being that *correlates, integrates, and enlivens* everything going on in the various dimensions of the self” (ibid., 199, emphasis original). It is the “life-centre” of the human self that regulates the other dimensions, including how they interact with one another and with the world. The soul is “deep,” Willard says, both in the sense of being basic and in the sense that it exists and functions “almost totally beyond conscious awareness” (ibid.).

Willard (2002, 200) takes Psalm 1 as descriptive of the ideal soul. It functions in perfect response to God—delighting in the knowledge of him—and thus manifests a flourishing life. In contrast, the lives of most give evidence of ruined souls. Blinded by false ideas, enslaved to disordered and destructive desires and bodily habits, and caught up in a tangle of loveless social arrangements, their lives display souls at harmony neither with themselves nor with God (ibid., 200–201). Willard’s claim is not that every person is as dysfunctional as they could be, but rather that the reality of the broken soul suffuses all of life. Indeed, if Willard’s understanding of the soul as the integrating, correlating, and enlivening aspect of the self is right, then it follows that a dysfunctional soul must and will cause dysfunction to spread through all aspects of the self. Furthermore, Willard argues, as a consequence of the rejection of the reality of the soul in modern life, the human experience of life itself is greatly diminished. In particular, life in most Western contexts has become superficial and devoid of meaning. Willard (ibid., 203) views this phenomenon as unsustainable for, in his analysis, meaning is arguably the most basic human need. In attempting to remedy the situation, modern Western man has become obsessed with *performance*, which Willard defines as the momentary illusion of meaning that, if successful, allows the performer’s soul a fleeting illusion of transcendence. This dynamic in turn fosters fanaticism, which Willard describes as the inevitable result of “inherently meaningless lives becoming obsessed with performance and then trying to take all of their existence into it” (ibid.).¹⁵⁶ It is not at all difficult to

156 Willard (2002, 203–204) sees this as the root of fanaticism in such varied arenas of life as sports, arts, politics, religion, social causes, and even romantic/sexual relationships.

see this performance—illusion/meaning—transcendence—fanaticism drama writ large across modern Western culture.

But reality cannot be forever denied, and man cannot long deny his nature—the soul must be acknowledged one way or another. For the Christian, soul-formation is possible but, as has been the case for every other aspect of the self, not automatic. The soul must be dealt with seriously and intelligently (Willard 2002, 207–209). For Willard, formation of the soul in Christlikeness consists mainly in two things: first, in personal relationship with God through his Word; and second, in commitment to faithful obedience and the concomitant abandonment of outcomes. As to the former, Willard sees the relationship between the human soul and the law of God as “absolutely vital” (Willard 2002, 200). The perfect soul of Psalm 1 delights in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night. The LORD instructed Joshua to do likewise (Josh 1:8), and David, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declared that “the law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul” (Ps 19:7). Willard contends that the law of God “is a spiritual power in its own right” in that it describes reality as it really is and, in particular, it describes the nature and character of God and the state of affairs between God and his creation, including mankind (*ibid.*, 211, 215).¹⁵⁷ Though the believer’s relationship with God is not on the basis of his or her own obedience to the law, nevertheless it remains an essential part of that relationship. Indeed, in the context of that by-grace relationship the law, being a living principle, instructs the heart and restores the flagging soul (*ibid.*, 212). Willard explains that there exists an “inner affinity” between the law of God and the soul of man. This is why rebellion against God’s law makes the soul sick, and conversely why love for the law restores the soul.

As to the latter, Willard (2002, 209) argues that the Christlike soul learns to act in concert with God and, crucially, to leave the outcomes of those actions to him. The human self simply does not have the wherewithal to guarantee any particular outcome in any given situation. Instead, the restored soul learns faithful obedience to God in the confidence that the outcomes of obedience are in his hands. Willard explains that God has appointed the world such that “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the

157 By the “law of God,” Willard means specifically that part of the Old Testament called “the Law” in the traditional division, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings—in other words, the Pentateuch. Willard (2002, 211) does acknowledge that the spiritual power he attributes to the Law applies to the Word of God generally.

strong, nor bread to the wise, [etc.]” (Eccl 9:11), and we cannot, therefore, ensure that any situation will turn out as we wish, even assuming the best of intentions and all the (humanly) necessary resources (Willard 2002, 210). Instead, the Christian rests in God’s providence, free from all anxiety, and lives in “deep soul rest” (ibid.).

Having considered Willard’s analysis of the soul and its restoration, we now consider the ways in which the doctrine of adoption serves that end. We begin with Willard’s assertion regarding the soul’s need for meaning, and his argument that it is this need that fuels modern performance in the search for transcendence. Whether or not Willard is exactly right in his description of this dynamic, we take his main point as axiomatic: human souls were made for something greater than themselves (cf. Eccl 3:11, “[God] has put eternity into man’s heart.”), and if God is rejected as that ‘something greater,’ then man will put himself (or at least an idealised image of himself) in God’s place (cf. Rom 1:21–23). To the extent that man does this, he becomes a fool in that he is choosing to live at odds with reality (cf. Rom 1:22; Ps 14:1). But, we contend, adoption reconciles God’s elect to reality. How, precisely? We have already seen that the great story, the theo-drama, into which we have been thrown is the story of God’s resolve to exalt his own glorious grace (cf. Eph 1:6). In Paul’s sweeping exposition of that drama in his letter to the Ephesian church, it is specifically in the accomplishment of adoption that the elect are brought into harmony with God’s great purpose. We noted that this purpose is anchored in the Pre-production *pactum salutis* and that it undergirds the temporal outworking of salvation in each act of the drama. Thus, the doctrine of adoption—in that it connects the souls of God’s elect to the grand theo-drama—answers the soul’s need for meaning. The adopted no longer need grope for a fleeting and illusory touch of transcendence; rather, they are inextricably bound up in the central purpose of God himself, to which the persons of the Trinity have committed themselves.

Thus, freed of the burden of having to find or create meaning, the adopted soul is now able simply to play its part in the grand theo-drama. What is that part? To be a son after the likeness of Christ. That entails understanding both the grand sweep of the theo-drama and the Father’s will for each adopted child in it. What is his will as it pertains to each adopted child? That they be conformed to the likeness of Christ. At this point the salvific accomplishment of adoption connects to Willard’s prescribed

remedy for the broken soul in that it is God's revelation in Scripture (i.e., God's law) of himself and of his purposes that teaches these things. Moreover, the adopted sons of God are indwelt by the "Spirit of adoption" (Rom 8:15) and are led by the Spirit such that they increasingly learn active obedience to God's law. In other words, it is by adoption that the elect are not merely informed of God's law, but empowered by the Spirit to fulfil it and thus rightly to play their part, as sons, in the grand drama. Furthermore, as the adopted try, and from time to time fail, to live as sons by the Spirit, it is the Spirit-given assurance that their relationship to God remains one of son to Father that encourages them to keep on learning to play their part (cf. Rom 8:16).

In addition to the above, adoptive sonship also teaches the elect to concern themselves with faithfulness to the Father's purposes and to leave the outcomes of their faithfulness in his hands. Jesus is the ultimate exemplar of this disposition in his faithfulness even unto the cross while committing himself into his Father's care. It is in terms of adoption that Paul exhorts believers to the same attitude, namely that they should be willing to suffer with Christ now in the knowledge that their adoption will ultimately be consummated with the redemption of their bodies in the eschatological age to come (cf. Rom 8:17–24).

In summary, we see that the requirements as prescribed by Willard for the reformation of the broken soul are met in adoption. The accomplishment of adoption entwines the elect in the ultimate purpose of the Trinity—the exaltation of the Father's glorious grace—and thus answers the soul's need for meaning. It is by adoption that the elect come into a new relationship to God's law, learning to love it as the revelation of their Father's purposes and an expression of his character, and thus desire to fulfil it. It is the reality of their adoption as sons, and the example of Christ, the Son par excellence, that enables them to prize faithful obedience and entrust the outcomes thereof to the Father. Thus we see, once again, that the doctrine of adoption offers substantial resources for the holistic renovation of the human self.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have answered our fourth and final subsidiary question by exploring the implications of the doctrine of adoption for Christian spiritual formation. Using Willard's model of the human self, we related each of the six aspects of the self to the

doctrine of adoption. Beginning with the mind, and the realm of thought specifically, we concluded that a correct understanding of the Father–son relationship of God to his elect ought to form the lifescape of every Christian, and that the accomplishment of adoption (as per our theo-dramatic presentation of Ch. 4) supplies both the ideas and the images necessary to transformation. Next, in the realm of feeling, adoption entails that the believer is indwelt by the Spirit of Christ and both learns to deny the desires of the flesh and experiences a transformation such that sinful and destructive feelings are progressively replaced by feelings accompanying the objective condition of sonship—namely pleasure in pleasing the Father. Entwined with thought and feeling is the dimension of the will, and in this regard we found that adoption entails the resolve to intelligent participation in the great theo-drama unfolding under the direction of the Father. It is upon the reality of the believer’s objective condition of adopted sonship that Paul grounds his exhortation to the adopted to exercise their wills in deliberately setting their minds on the things of the Spirit—thus reinforcing the thought–feeling–willing dynamic of formation in Christlikeness.

As regards the bodily life of the believer, we have seen that it is the ministry of the indwelling Spirit of adoption that enables the believer to give action to their transformed thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Thus, beyond mere theorising about transformation in Christlikeness, it is in the doctrine of adoption that we find resources for tangible instances of Christlike living in and through the physical body. This, in turn, leads to a transformation of the social circles of the adopted as they increasingly replace loveless behaviours (i.e., assault and withdrawal) with words and actions that bless those they relate to as appropriate to the nature of the relationship. With respect to the soul, it is in the accomplishment of adoption that the soul is bound up in the ultimate purpose of the Trinity—the exaltation of the Father’s glorious grace—and therein finds ultimate meaning. Further, it is in adoption that the soul’s relationship to God’s law is made right. Insofar as the law is the revelation of the person, character, and purposes of their Father, so the adopted learn to love it and desire to keep it. As the integrating, correlating, and enlivening dimension of the self, this new-found love for the law has the effect of restoring the soul. The restored soul functions properly, manifesting the whole-orbed life of sons of the Father after the likeness of Christ.

Earlier in our study we found that Paul's various uses of the metaphor of adoption brought certain doctrinal emphases to the fore, and that the best treatments of the doctrine through the history of the church faithfully preserved these emphases. These exegetical and historical analyses were followed by our own presentation of the doctrine of adoption. In this chapter, we have sought to do justice to the import of the metaphor by fleshing out the inescapable entailments of it for Christian spiritual formation. In so doing we have established that the soteriological metaphor of adoption not only complements other, more forensically oriented metaphors of salvation, but that it also provides the resources for the transformation of every aspect of the human self.

CHAPTER 6

REVIEW AND CONCLUSION

This study set out to discover the ways in which the soteriological accomplishment of adoption might bear upon Christian spiritual formation. Pursuant to that overarching objective, Smith's (2013, 49–56) four-step configuration of Osborne's (2006, 406–409) approach to systematic theological formulation was selected as the appropriate methodology, four corresponding subsidiary questions were formulated, and a chapter was dedicated to answering each of them. Having reached the end of those four chapters, we now draw this project to a close with a brief methodological review, a summary of our key findings, and concluding thoughts in the form of an affirmation, brief reflections on the significance of this study, suggestions for further research, and a closing prayer.

6.1 Review of research methodology

Osborne's (2006, 406–409) nine-step approach to systematic theological formulation is well established, and Smith's (2013, 49–56) four-step configuration of it provided a helpful 'track' on which to move this study along from biblical exegesis, to an analysis of historical and contemporary theology, to a fresh theological formulation, and finally to consideration of the entailments thereof for Christian spiritual formation. For the encouragement received to adopt this approach, this writer is grateful, as it led to a rich and rewarding experience.

A drawback of this approach, however, is that it was very difficult to give each of those four steps the detailed engagement necessary to Master's-level research while keeping the whole project within 50 000 words. Indeed, this writer found it impossible. Granted, some improvements to writing style might have shed some words here and there, and the tightening of some arguments a few more, but fundamentally it is this

writer's view that the research questions, as formulated, required the space they now occupy.

An alternative approach would have been to select either the exegetical or the historical background and omit the other; or to retain both but omit the application to Christian spiritual formation and conclude the study instead with our theological formulation. The study would have been poorer for it, though, had either of those alternatives been preferred. In the end, notwithstanding the volume of work, this writer is glad to have taken each of the four steps and given each the attention they deserved, and is persuaded the final result justifies it.

6.2 *Summary of key findings*

Our first subsidiary goal was to examine Paul's uses of the metaphor of adoption in his letters to the Ephesian, Galatian, and Roman churches. From this corpus we distilled five key emphases. First, we found that the doctrine of adoption functions as an organising soteriological metaphor in that it embraces the full arc of redemptive history from the pre-temporal to the eschatological. In short, redemption history may be told as the story of adoptive sonship purposed, promised, foreshadowed, accomplished, applied, and consummated. Second, we found the exegetical evidence to support the claim that Paul sees adoption to sonship as the apex of salvific accomplishment. Adoption, in other words, is soteriology's crowning jewel. Third, we found that the accomplishment of adoption and the coming of the age of the Spirit are inextricably conjoined realities. Simply put, the age of the Spirit is the age of the accomplishment of adoption. Fourth, we found that the doctrine of adoption presents a soteriology in which formation in the likeness of Christ is inherent, and not a related-but-separable extra. Salvation is, in other words, *intrinsically* transformative. Finally, we found the doctrine of adoption to be a distinct lens through which to view the united purpose and distinct actions of the three persons of the Trinity—all, ultimately, to the praise of the glorious grace of the Father.

Following our study of the Pauline presentation of adoption, and in relation to our second subsidiary goal, we traced the treatment of the doctrine through the history of the church, beginning with the patristic fathers, followed by the scholars of the medieval period, the Reformation, the Post-Calvin Reformation, the Reformed Scholastics, the

English Puritans, the Dutch Further Reformation, and finally contemporary scholarship. We found that the best historical treatments preserved the five emphases summarised above, with adoption often serving as a synonym for salvation *in toto*. Regrettably, though the vast historical span of our survey may give the impression that the doctrine has enjoyed sustained reflection, we found that not to have been the case. The doctrine shone brightest in the works of Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Augustine during the patristic era—thereafter flickering only rather dimly for a thousand years until Calvin, in whose writings it blazed more brightly than at any other time since Paul. Indeed, by choosing ‘Father’ as his chief descriptor for God, Calvin chooses adoption as the soteriological metaphor through which to understand, most fundamentally, who God is. It is fair to say that Calvin represents the high point of the church’s reflection on the doctrine of adoption to date. Disappointing treatments of adoption post-Calvin saw adoption relegated to the shadows of soteriological reflection.

In fulfilment of our third subsidiary goal, we offered our own presentation of adoption, in which we sought to remain true to the emphases we found in Paul and that were faithfully transmitted through the best treatments in the history of the church. At the same time, our presentation was styled in such a way as to aid in the enterprise of Christian spiritual formation. For this we adopted Vanhoozer’s theo-dramatic metaphor and told the story of sonship: purposed pre-temporally in the *pactum salutis* for the glory of the Father, created and lost in Eden, covenanted and foreshadowed in Israel, accomplished by adoption in Christ, applied by the Spirit and realised in the church, and anticipated in full consummation in the eschaton. Our aim was a presentation of the soteriological accomplishment of adoption that simultaneously highlights its relation to the superobjective of the drama—namely “the completion and perfection of the image of God in humanity, the creation of a people with whom God can fellowship and enjoy right relations” (Vanhoozer 2005, 391)—and aids fitting participation in it.

Finally, in relation to our fourth subsidiary goal, we probed the implications of the doctrine of adoption for Christian spiritual formation using Willard’s model of the human self. Through a careful examination of each of the six aspects of the self, and of the interrelations of those parts, we found the accomplishment of adoption to bear more than just *implications*, but rather inescapable *entailments*, for Christian spiritual formation. We found Christian spiritual formation to be the process of formation of mind

and heart increasingly toward the likeness of Christ—the Son—such that the inner world of the adopted son becomes like the inner world of Christ himself, with corresponding transformation of the bodily and social dimensions of the self following, and all of these being integrated under the direction of an increasingly Christlike (i.e., ‘Son-like’) soul. At its essence we found this ‘Son-like’ soul to be one that finds its own greatest joy in bringing pleasure to the Father by trustingly obeying him. Importantly, we found the accomplishment of adoption to bear more than entailments for Christian spiritual formation—it also provides the resources for that formation. *Not only does the doctrine of adoption teach us that we ought to conform to the likeness of Christ, but the Spirit-applied fact of its accomplishment empowers the adopted to effect that transformation en route to the consummation of it.*

Having thus met our four subsidiary goals for this project, this study now concludes with an overarching affirmation, brief reflections on the significance and contribution of this study, four proposals for further investigation, and a prayer.

6.3 *Concluding affirmation and reflections on the significance and contribution of the study*

We affirm that the metaphor of adoption presents a soteriology in which formation in Christlikeness is inherent to the very nature of salvation.

This is significant insofar as it reminds us that Christian salvation entails more than what many have settled for. The metaphor of justification has become, functionally at least, the dominant lens through which the church has understood and propounded salvation. And, as our study has shown, the same largely applies in the realm of theological scholarship. Garner (2016, 300) captured the matter well in expressing his disappointment with the “forensically fixated” soteriological understanding of the church through most of its history. The church’s attention to justification has been necessary, but it ought not to have been the whole story. Regrettably, the relative lack of attention to other metaphors of salvation has yielded a rather truncated soteriology that, in turn, has yielded a rather anaemic understanding of, and commitment to, Christian spiritual formation. Bluntly, the emphasis on salvation-as-justification alone, to the functional (almost) exclusion of salvation-as-adoption-to-sonship, has delivered an understanding of Christianity as merely a matter of having one’s sins forgiven and

an entry ticket to heaven, and in which transformation towards Christlikeness features too little.

While it is not the ambition of this study to detract in any measure from the wonder that sinners such as this writer may have peace with the Holy God through justification (Rom 5:1), it is our hope that the essentially filial nature of salvation in Christ be understood and embraced.

This study contributes to the nascent revival of interest in the Pauline metaphor of adoption and the related doctrine of sonship and, in this respect, follows in the footsteps of, for example, Byrne (1979), Scott (1992), Trumper (2001), Garner (2002, 2016), Burke (2006), Beeke (2008), Heim (2014), Saito (2016), Lin (2017), and Ferguson (2017). The unique contribution of this project, however, is in its particular interest in the entailments of the objective condition of adoptive sonship for Christian spiritual formation. To this writer's knowledge, no prior research has covered the same ground. A further, though secondary, contribution is in the example this project sets of the thoroughgoing application of one soteriological metaphor to a holistic model of the human self—in this case, Willard's (2002). Again, to this writer's knowledge, such a project has not previously been attempted.

It is our hope that this project both aids in retrieving the doctrine of adoption from the shadows of theological consciousness and Christian experience, and stimulates further research into the nature of the human self and the specific implications of the nature of salvation in Christ for restoration in Christ—in both this world and the world to come.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

We propose, first, that present evangelicalism would benefit from a greater appreciation of the doctrine of adoption and its entailments for spiritual formation. Subsidiary to this proposal, pastors would benefit from a greater appreciation of the story-arc of sonship, and the place of adoption in it, and churches would benefit as these intertwined themes found expression from the pulpit. This may entail that evangelical seminaries consider the attention (or lack thereof) given to adoption in their soteriological teaching. To put it somewhat provocatively: Is it possible that much

current soteriological instruction has become, in effect, a presentation and defence of justification?

We propose, second, that corporate worship liturgies structured around the themes of sonship and adoption ought to complement forensically oriented liturgies, which seem to dominate in evangelical churches. Chapell rightly explains that liturgy communicates “gospel understanding” (Chapell 2009, 17), and shows how churches throughout history have intentionally structured their various liturgies to highlight certain theological truths. Of course, to attempt to highlight *everything* at once is, in effect, to highlight *nothing*—and so we do not propose that familial aspects of salvation are simply inserted into liturgies that are, essentially, forensically oriented. Rather, let the forensic face of the gospel be celebrated for what it is. But could not the familial face, from time to time, be likewise celebrated by means of thoughtful liturgies designed to lead God’s people through the story of sonship purposed (in the *pactum salutis*), lost (in Adam), promised (in Israel), accomplished (by adoption in Christ), experienced (in the church), and anticipated (in full consummation in the eschaton) along the lines of our presentation in Chapter 4 herein?

We propose, third, that a study similar to this one, but focused on the Johannine metaphor of ‘new birth’ (and its place within the larger story-arc of ‘life’) and its entailments for Christian spiritual formation would be a valuable complement. Recalling the tendency we observed (especially in the Puritans) to conflate Pauline and Johannine soteriological metaphors, it is clear that at least some have instinctively discerned a close correspondence between adoption/sonship (as per Paul) and new birth/life (as per John). Just as we have sought to hear Paul’s voice clearly in this study, so an attempt to hear John on his own terms would be equally valuable.

We propose, finally, that further research into the nature of the human self, considered from a Christian perspective, be done and that the implications of salvation in Christ for the self—particularly in light of the present confusion as to the nature of the human self—be investigated, and both the pastoral and apologetic implications thereof be expounded.

6.5 *Closing prayer*

We pray that our own learning through this study would result in ever-increasing personal conformity to the likeness of Christ, and that our small contribution to this field of study would be “to the praise of [the Father’s] glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6). Amen.

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